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THE STAR OF MINGRELIA

BY
George W. M. REYNOLDS

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LEILA

OR

THE STAR OF MINGRELIA

BY

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

NEW EDITION VOL. II.

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MADRAS.

which Aladyn had purchased for himself and his followers in Constantinople were of the finest Arab breed, swift of foot, and capable of much endurance. The road which was taken was the most direct towards the Georgian frontier, which, however, lay at a distance of no less than seven hundred miles; for the whole of the huge province of Anatolia had to be traversed. It was Aladyn's plan to journey as rapidly as was consistent with circumstances; and he had already made up his mind not to take Kars in his way, much though he longed to call upon the Pasha, his uncle by adoption, and reveal to him the marvellous things which had come to his knowledge, as well as to present his cousin the Princess of Mingrelia. But so long as Leila was within the Turkish frontier, her safety could not be looked upon as completely ensured; and it would most seriously compromise the generous and excellent Pasha of Kars, if it happened to transpire that he had received at his palace the fugitive favourite of the Ramazan.

Hafiz, who was fond of exciting adventures, was now in his element; and even the cautious Ibrahim was well contented to serve his beloved master in the present undertaking—for he had conceived the utmost esteem and respect for the character of the Star of Mingrelia. Moreover, Aladyn had afforded his two faithful followers some little insight into the circumstances for which he had been summoned in the first instance from Kars to Tiflis; he had revealed to them the secret of his birth; and they therefore knew it was his own cousin whom they were all engaged in escorting away

from the vicinity of the perils which had threatened her.

Throughout the night the *araba* and the horsemen continued their way; and after sunrise they reached a hamlet where it was determined to rest for a little while, but more for the sake of the steeds than for the travellers themselves,—Leila and Klodissa being in no sense wearied—on the contrary being anxious to continue the journey with the least possible delay. The halt however enabled our travellers to refresh themselves with the requisite ablutions and food; and so soon as it was considered that the horses were likewise sufficiently refreshed, the party set out again.

The road now lay across a wide open tract of country, where, in consequence of the ungenial nature of the soil, there were but few signs of agriculture, and where the habitations of human beings were few and far between. The path itself was not always good: and our travellers progressed less rapidly than they had hitherto done. The *araba* was occasionally much jolted: but Leila begged that a too delicate consideration for her sake might not impede the celerity of their pace more than unavoidable circumstances were already checking it: and Aladyn could not do otherwise than admire the heroism and the fortitude of his young and beautiful cousin.

In consequence of the increasing difficulties of the route, Aladyn and his two dependants rode a little way in advance of the *araba*,—exploring as it were the nature of the country; for it was occasionally found that by a divergence from what was actually the road, the

equipage could better achieve its progress. Frequent were the glances that Aladyn, Ibrahim, and Hafiz flung behind them, to scour the horizon and assure themselves that they were free from pursuit. For some time there was no cause for apprehension on this point: but at length Aladyn, when casting a look over his shoulder, gave a sudden start, which was instantaneously noticed by Ibrahim and Hafiz. Quick as lightning did these two faithful dependants glance rearward; and their looks, the next moment meeting those of Aladyn, proved to our young hero that they were struck by the same cause for apprehension which had startled himself.

"We are pursued!" he said. "Those objects move!—they are horse men on the horizon!"

"Yes—it is so," observed Ibrahim, with a more phlegmatic quietude. "We shall soon ascertain how many there are; and if there be only such odds as two to one, they may rely upon a warm reception."

"Yes—by Allah!" ejaculated Hafiz, "the Princess shall not be captured so long as a spark of life remains in our bodies!"

"Well spoken, my good and trusty followers!" replied Aladyn. "But hush! let us not alarm the Princess or Klodissa until our fears receive some better confirmation! The driver of the *araba* already perceives the quick looks which we now cast behind us, and the sudden fugitiveness which has been the Leila's."

Aladyn accordingly made signs to the driver to quicken the pace of his horses, but to forbear from

asking any questions; and as he

again glanced towards the horizon, he said, "The horsemen have disappeared! It may be false alarm after all!—But no! it was merely a hollow which concealed them from our view! See! they emerge into sight again!—and by heaven! it is a numerous party!"

"At least twenty," said Ibrahim. "There are cavalry-soldiers. Behold! the sun glitters upon their weapons!"

"Doubtless," added Hafiz, "it is a detachment of the Light Horse which do duty at the Sultan's palace. And now what will your Excellency do?"

"They gain upon us!—that is but too evident!" exclaimed Aladyn. "Were we trusting to our own good steeds only, we might outstrip them yet! But that *araba* progresses at a snail's pace in comparison with the fleetness of those who are coming on!"

It was with rapid utterance that Aladyn thus spoke,—yet with only that degree of excitement which a brave mind might naturally display, but which did not for an instant overrule his firmness or self-possession. And all the while he was looking behind as his steed cantered along the road: his keen eyes were measuring the distance between his own party and those whom he could no longer doubt to be otherwise than pursuers. He saw that they were indeed gaining ground; and his resolve was quickly taken how to act.

"Yes," he said, "they are at least twenty in number—and it were utter madness for us to dream of resistance! We should but be courting inevitable death for ourselves and throwing away the last chance of saving the Princess!"

again. It may be better described as an immense long crack, several yards wide in some places, narrower in others—but nevertheless anywhere of a width sufficient to engulf both horse and riders if abruptly coming upon it at the tremendous pace which Aladyn had so recently been adopting. He could discern neither the end nor the beginning of this chasm; and having walked his steed along the edge, though at a safe distance therefrom, for nearly a mile, it still continued its yawning, gaping way so far as his eye could reach. In short, it seemed as if the earth had suddenly thus opened in order to bar the progress of our youthful hero and his lovely burden.

All in a moment certain sounds were wafted to his ears, which made him turn his eyes in a particular direction; and he beheld four of the Turkish cavalry-soldiers galloping from a distance. This time he could not avoid giving a sudden start; so that Leila anxiously inquired whether the pursuers were at hand?

"Yes, my beloved;" responded Aladyn with a tender earnestness. "But for heaven's sake retain your fortitude!—cling to me! I will defend you to the last!"

Supporting her light beautiful form with his left arm, Aladyn drew his sabre; and brandishing it in his right hand, he nerved himself for the encounter: for at the moment he felt convinced that this was the only alternative left him by the desperation of the circumstances in which he was placed. Before him was the gulf—behind him were the pursuers; and their relative position was such that if he were to gallop along the

side of the chasm, he would be inevitably cut off—for it was an uneven and broken part of the ground where he now was, while they might career over a soft and easy sward-like grass.

Nearer they came; and all in a moment there was the report of a pistol. The bullet went whistling past Aladyn's leg. His pursuers, ignorant that his course was barred by the chasm, evidently feared that he might take himself to renewed flight: they were discharging their fire-arms—but levelling low with the view of striking his steed and thus accomplishing an easy capture.

"Oh, dearest cousin! beloved Danial!" exclaimed Leila, in accents of rending anguish: "to think that on my account you must die!"

"Courage, sweetest Leila!—courage, my angel!" he ejaculated, as a sudden idea struck him: and he strained her more forcibly to his heart.

Bullet after bullet was discharged by the pistols of the pursuers—report after report rang through the sunlit air: but fortunately the winged balls failed to hit their mark. Aladyn's eyes swept round upon the scene. Nearer came his pursuers: in two moments they would be up with him in combat against them with fire-arms as they be a deed of madness that Leila would prefer what she looked upon in the Sultan's harem a chance of escape—oh, so desperate!—but they would at least be locked in each other's arms, the

No sooner resolved upon, than executed !

"Cling to me, beloved Leila !" exclaimed Aladyn in thrilling tones: "cling to me, darling, for your life!—and we shall be saved !"

He wheeled round his steed as he thus spoke: he commended himself to God—a sufficient distance from the chasm for his purpose was gained—once more with skilful hand did he turn the willing, yet spirited animal—then into its flanks he dashed the rowels of his spurs—and right ahead towards the gulf, at one of the narrowest parts which in that neighbourhood it presented, did the careering courser go. The pursuers were now close behind: they thought that Aladyn was turning to flee on fair ground; another pistol was discharged, this time point-blank at himself—but the bullet whistled by his ear; and at the same instant, in the twinkling of an eye, the steed cleared the yawning abyss.

Well was it for his pursuers that the leaping action of the horse suddenly struck their attention, as they themselves came dashing on upon their own steeds: otherwise into the chasm would they have plunged, deep down—headlong! But expert masters of their animals, they reined them quickly in, literally throwing themselves back in their saddles with horror at the awful peril which they had escaped. And on the other side of the abyss—now already far away—was the fugitive Aladyn, with the lovely Leila in his arms—borne onward by the gallant steed which had saved them from falling into the hands of their enemies!

When the four Turkish soldiers

had recovered from the horror and stupefaction into which the terrific leap had thrown them—a feat which they felt by no means inclined to imitate—they rode hastily along the course of the chasm in the hope of arriving at its extremity or at some part sufficiently narrow to be leaped fearlessly. But after proceeding for about a couple of miles, their way was barred by a deep ravine, from which that chasm stretched out at right angles; and they had to follow the ravine—to turn it when it ceased—and then pursue it on the other side, before they could continue the chase. Thus an hour was lost to them: but the gain of it to Aladyn and Leila was their salvation !

At a hamlet some twenty miles distant from the scene where that terrific exploit was accomplished by our young hero, he and Leila were rejoined by Hafiz, Klodissa, and Ibrahim. It is not requisite to linger over our narrative in order to explain by what hair-breadth means they likewise had escaped from the pursuers, who had divided themselves into three or four different parties in order to beat the country when Aladyn with his lovely burden had disappeared from their view in the vast hollow containing the wood. Suffice it to say that our fugitives had all succeeded in eluding those who were bent upon chase; and it was a happy accident which re-united them at this hamlet.

Thence, so soon as the steeds were suitably refreshed, the journey was continued. But here again it is unnecessary to spin out our story with minute details. Suffice it to record that at the

nearest town steeds were purchased for Leila and Klodissa; and that the Star of Mingrelia as well as the swarthy female displayed the most heroic perseverance, the most untiring energy, and the most marvellous fortitude in pressing on with their escort through the immense province of Anatolia. That distance of hundreds of miles was accomplished in an incredibly short space of time; and at length the Georgian frontier was reached. There Leila was safe; and oh! what a recompense for all perils that had been dared—for all fatigues that had been endured, was the ability to pronounce in confidence that single word "Safe!"

A rest for two whole days in a Georgian town was now enjoyed by our travellers; and then the journey was resumed towards Tiflis. Leila had not forgotten her sacred promise to Tarkhana; and the direct route was accordingly diverged from in order that a visit might be paid to the farm-house inhabited by the Georgian widow and her daughters. Most hospitable was the reception there experienced by Leila and her companions; and the Star of Mingrelia lost no time in explaining to the Georgian widow all those circumstances which had thrown her in the way of that worthy woman's lost daughter Ayesha, now her Highness Tarkhana. The Georgian widow's astonishment was only equalled by the feelings of tenderness at what she heard; and when Leila had delivered the messages sent by Tarkhana, the good woman murmured, with tears in her eyes, "It is heaven's dispensation, and I must submit! At least I am re-

lieved of all anxious suspense in reference to my dearly beloved Ayesha. She is alive—she is resigned, even if she not altogether happy!"

The journey was continued towards the capital of Georgia. The sun was setting amidst the mountains of the Caucasus, as our party of travellers came in view of Tiflis. It was from the summit of a hill that they thus obtained the first glimpse on this occasion of that city from which Leila had been so cruelly torn away, and which Aladyn had quitted with a heart that was filled with the cruellest affliction. On they went;—and soon they drew near to that gloomy fortress which served as the metropolitan gaol. All of a sudden a singular spectacle met their view; and Aladyn exclaimed, "By heaven! 'tis a daring feat! Behold that prisoner who is escaping!"

They all reined in their steeds with astonishment at the occurrence which was passing before their eyes, but the details of which we must reserve for the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A RAPID SUCCESSION OF INCIDENTS.

THE last beams of the setting sun were quivering above the Caucasian hills, as the spectacle mentioned at the close of the preceding chapter met the eyes of our travellers at a little distance. In consequence of the elevation of the ground on which they now halted to contemplate that scene, it was discernible in all its details.

An individual, having the appearance of a tall slender man, was lowering himself by a rope from a window in one of the lofty towers which flanked the fortalice that served as a prison.

"What can the guard be about," exclaimed Hafiz, "that yon daring adventurer deems it feasible to attempt this exploit while it is still light?"

"Doubtless," observed Ibrahim, "from the rules and circumstances of his captivity, this is the only opportune moment that he could possibly find for such an achievement."

"See!" cried Aladyn, "he has glided down to the full length of the rope! Poor wretch, it is too short!—he has much to risk! But no! he plants his foot on the roof of some low out-building!—he makes a spring!—the rope flies from his hand! Ah! he has fallen to the ground!"

There was a silence of nearly half a minute,—during which the travellers kept their eyes fixed upon the spot where the escaping prisoner had so suddenly disappeared; and then Aladyn ejaculated, "No! he has not fallen! Behold him again!—he is creeping along the roofs of those houses!"

"But they are within the precincts of the fortalice," said Ibrahim; "and he has yet much to achieve. What will your Excellency do?"

Hitherto the interest which was so suddenly excited by a spectacle of such a bold and daring character had absorbed all other thoughts but this abruptly put question from the lips of Ibrahim was suggestive of a duty on the part of those who heard it. A prisoner

was escaping before their eyes; and by remaining there as simple spectators of the proceeding, they were becoming almost accessories to it. Yet merciful considerations mingled with the sense of duty with which they were suddenly inspired.

"Perhaps," suggested Leila, "it is some unfortunate debtor?"

"Or the victim of some injustice?" added Klodissa.

"A political prisoner perchance?" interjected Hafiz—"one who has felt the iron yoke of Russian tyranny?"

"Yes—who knows?" exclaimed Aladyn. "The life of an innocent man may be at stake!—the happiness of a wife and children may at this moment be depending on the result of that bold adventure!"

"And on the other hand," observed Ibrahim, "it may be a criminal of the blackest dye—such a wretch, for instance, as Tunar."

This colloquy consisted of a succession of remarks so rapid that they only occupied a few moments; and the whole time the eyes of the travellers remained riveted upon the object of their interest and of their discourse. He was still passing along the roofs of several low out-buildings and houses, which were in the immediate neighbourhood of the gloomy stone fortalice itself, and, as Ibrahim had observed, within the precincts of the defence-works themselves. Indeed, it was clear enough to our travellers that the daring adventurer, whoever he were, would have to cross a moat and scale a wall before his escape could be finally accomplished. From the point where they stood they could not discern whether there were actually any sentinels to bar the way

which the individual must necessarily take; and though it seemed scarcely possible on the one hand that such precautions would be neglected by the Russian soldiers who garrisoned the city and who were charged with the protection of the fortress—yet on the other hand it appeared equally incredible that the prisoner would attempt so desperate an exploit with the certainty of encountering armed opposition ere it were completed.

"Yes!" cried Aladyn, after a brief pause in the discourse, during which his thoughts had remained settled upon the concluding observation made by Ibrahim; "it is possible that it is Tunar! Tall and slender that escaping adventurer assuredly is!—and, by heaven, 'tis he himself!"

It was the last ray of the setting sun which, falling upon the escaping captive just at the moment he was gliding down the sloping roof of an out-house, revealed his glossy chestnut hair to the keen eyes of Aladyn. Ejaculations of excited wonderment burst from the lips of Aladyn's companions; and Ibrahim exclaimed, "The murderer of the worthy Mansour must not be suffered thus to escape from the arm of justice!"

"No!" ejaculated Aladyn. "Away with you, Hafiz!—gallop down to the gate—give warning of what is being done—and we will intercept the young criminal if in the meantime he should succeed in passing the moat!"

Away sped Hafiz down the sloping road as quick as his careering steed could go; and the other travellers remained stationary upon the eminence, in order that Aladyn

and Ibrahim might keep watch over all the neighbourhood of the fortress, which the extensive range of their view from that point commanded.

And Tunar it indeed was whom Aladyn had thus recognised, and who was making this seemingly desperate attempt at escape. But it was not altogether so foolhardy a one as Aladyn had supposed in the case that there were sentinels to be passed ere he could finally achieve his freedom. During the period of his imprisonment, which had lasted for nearly a month, certain friends outside had found the means of communicating with him, by bribing two soldiers of the depot at the fortalice. By virtue of certain arrangements and understandings, Tunar was to make the attempt on the very first occasion when it should happen that those two sentinels could best further his aims. Thus, according to this necessity which ruled his actions, it was impossible for him to choose an hour of darkness, if it should happen that the favourable conjuncture presented itself during the period of light. In plain terms, there were invariably two sentinels posted on the side of the moat which Tunar would have to traverse; and it was *only* when the couple of soldiers who were bribed to his interests should be on duty there together, at the same time that the attempt could be made. Hence the execution of the project on this particular evening, at the setting of the sun, only some twenty minutes before the guard would make its round to relieve those two sentinels and leave others in their places.

Let us now for a while follow the

fortunes of Tunar. On gliding down from the roof of that low out-building where by the aid of the parting sun beam he was recognised by Aladyn, the adventurous youth found himself in a court-yard enclosed on three sides but open on the brink of the moat, along which indeed a pathway ran for the use of sentries. The two friendly sentinels might easily—without much risk of being charged with complicity or dereliction of duty—keep their beats at such a distance, and so completely under the cover of buildings, as to remain beyond the view of the course which Tunar had hitherto taken. But finally he was to make a dash into the moat, swim across it, scale the low defence-work, which was on the opposite side, and trust for the rest to whatsoever crowning arrangements his friends outside might have made. According to the previous understanding, if all things went thus far well, the sentries would fire their muskets on hearing the splash in the water, so as to keep up appearances and divert suspicion from themselves; but they had promised, and indeed intended, to fire wide of the object, and thus ensure his escape.

The reader now comprehends the circumstances in which this escape was attempted; and Tunar flattered himself that everything was going well. His keen eyes had discerned a party of men and women on a hill at a little distance: but he had not recognised any of them: and though from the fact of their remaining motionless the idea struck him that they were watching the progress of his escape—yet on the other hand, as they

seemed to manifest no inclination to interfere, he ceased to be alarmed on the point. Gliding down from the roof of the house at the very moment when Hafiz darted away in obedience to Aladyn's order, Tunar noted not the incident; for on alighting in the court-yard, the little troop of halting travellers had suddenly been lost to his view. And now he was on the very point of rushing towards the moat and plunging into it to dare the final exploit, when all in an instant the sound of a voice speaking angrily met his ears. This was none other than the corporal of the guard, who having taken it into his head—without any motive or suspicion however—to make a round at that particular time, was ordering the two friendly sentinels to keep more on a particular beat than he found them doing. For an instant, on hearing that voice, Tunar was bewildered how to act: he could not catch the words that were being spoken; and he was uncertain whether the voice belonged to one of the friendly sentinels or not. His mind was however quickly made up how to act; and springing forward, he plunged into the moat.

“By St. Nicholas, an escape!” ejaculated the Russian corporal: and his musket, being instantaneously levelled at Tunar, discharged its bullet.

The ball splashed in the water within a few inches of the youth's head at the very moment that he dived down: and the first report was instantaneously followed by that of the two sentinels, who however took very good care to fire sufficiently wide of the escap-

ing prisoner to guarantee him against injury, and yet to avoid being suspected of such complicity in his flight.

"After him!" ejaculated the corporal; and he dashed into the moat, the two sentinels immediately following.

Tunar quickly gained the opposite bank: but as he was making for the defence-work which now alone seemed to stand betwixt him and freedom, his foot caught in the elongating, curving, bared root of a tree—so that he fell headlong. In the twinkling of an eye he was upon his feet again; but the corporal was now close behind him. The Russian non-commissioned officer's bullet had been discharged—his piece was unloaded—but he rushed at Tunar with his fixed bayonet. The youth's position now seemed perilous to a degree; and he felt that naught but desperate daring could save him. He seized the bayonet with both his hands: it was at the instant by an almost preterhuman development of strength that he forced it back as its point was within an inch of his breast; but impelled with the energy of a thousand, he wrenched the musket from its possessor. Then one tremendous blow, and the unfortunate corporal was hurled into the moat!

All that we have just been describing was the work of a few instants; and the two sentinels, having in their turn gained the same side of the moat as that where this scene took place, made a show of rushing with their fixed bayonets towards Tunar. But fleet as a careering steed—swift as the hound loosened from its leash—

rapid as an arrow shot from a bow, Tunar dashed away, at the moment that some dozen of Russian soldiers, alarmed by the report of the muskets, came rushing round the inner side of the moat towards the scene of those incidents which we have been describing.

Up the outer defence-work flew Tunar—a dozen bullets whistled past his ears—but unhurt, he sprang down the exterior slope of the fortification, and vanished from the view of those who were in the precincts of the fortalice. Away he sped!—away as if it were the hunted deer pursued by the hounds! and at a distance of some two hundred yards he plunged into a little copse in the neighbourhood of one of those antique grotesque-looking windmills which are to be seen in the vicinage of Tiflis.

There, just within the copse, two men were ready mounted upon their steeds; and a third horse, as yet riderless, was held by one of them. These two men were Kyri Karaman and Djemzet,—and we should observe that having been for the last half-hour hidden in that copse, they had not noticed the party of travellers that had halted on an eminence at no great distance. But still, from the point where Karaman and his follower were thus concealed, they had been enabled to watch through the trees Tunar's descent from the tower; they had heard the reports of the musketry—for a few minutes they had fancied that all was over; but they had resolved to await the issue—and they were as much surprised as gladdened when they suddenly beheld Tunar gliding with an almost magical swiftness towards them.

But soon—indeed within a few moments—the outwork from which he had so abruptly reappeared to their view presented the spectacle of a dozen or more Russian soldiers clearing it as rapidly as he himself had just done. The copse was, however, reached in safety by the daring youth, as we have recently said: he sprang upon the steed that was in readiness for him; and away he dashed in company with Kyri Karaman and Djemzet.

Meanwhile, from the eminence to which we have so often alluded, Aladyn, Ibrahim, Leila, and Klodissa watched the progress of the singular and exciting adventure of which accident had thus rendered them the witnesses. They too heard the reports of the musketry—they too thought that all was over, that Tunar was recaptured or killed, and that therefore the mission of Hafiz to the gate of the fortalice would in the end prove an unnecessary step. But presently they beheld Tunar flying like the wind from the external defence-work and making towards the copse in the neighbourhood of the windmill. Then Aladyn and Ibrahim, leaving Leila and Klodissa upon the eminence, urged their steeds into a gallop that they might cut off Tunar's retreat and surrender one whom they regarded as a murderer back again into the hands of justice. But between the spot which they had just quitted and the mill in the neighbourhood of the copse there was a deep and extensive quarry; so that they were compelled to make a considerable circuit in a direction still farther off from the fortalice. In consequence of this delay, Tunar succeeded in gaining the copse,

whence he and his two friends, Kyri Karaman and Djemzet, quickly emerged in full career as already described.

Not many minutes had elapsed since these three darted forth on their steeds from the copse, when they beheld two horsemen galloping towards them. Kyri Karaman and Djemzet had never before seen Aladyn and Ibrahim: but an ejaculation from the lips of Tunar speedily made them aware who these two horsemen were.

"'Tis well!" cried the Guerilla bandit, a fierce joy flashing from his large brilliant eyes: "the moment is come for me to avenge upon that young Turk the defeat of my men, which was the primal cause of all my misfortunes! Level your weapon, Djemzet!—take good aim—and fire!"

While thus speaking, Kyri Karaman had rapidly unstrung the rifle that was suspended to his back; and in another moment it was pointed towards Aladyn. But our youthful hero's keen eyes had caught the proceeding: a pistol, snatched from his holster, was already in his own hand: he fired—and Kyri Karaman's horse dropped dead upon the ground. Down came the Guerilla-bandit at the very instant that the trigger of his rifle was pulled; and well was it for Aladyn that the usually unerring aim of Kyri Karaman was thus abruptly diverted by the prostration of his steed. The bullet of that rifle whistled harmlessly by our hero: at the same moment Ibrahim discharged a pistol at Djemzet—but without effect. This Guerilla's steed darted aside at the report of the fire-arms; and thus the man's rifle proved as ineffectual

in respect to Ibrahim as Kyri Karaman's was with regard to Aladyn.

But already was Tunar scouring away across the hills; for the reader has seen enough of his character to be aware that self-preservation was with him ever uppermost thought; and besides, in the present instance flight was really his best alternative—for he was unarmed, and therefore unable to afford any succour to his comrades. Djemzet, on the contrary, would have tarried to share the fortunes of his master: but his steed, completely beyond his control, dashed off in the same direction which Tunar had already taken; and the next instant Aladyn and Ibrahim were in hot pursuit. For when they perceived that Tunar had taken to flight, they lingered not to care for the individual who had fallen, and whom they little suspected to be Kyri Karaman. It was Tunar, the supposed murderer of the venerable Mansour, whom they sought,—him they therefore pursued! Fleet as a whirlwind went the steeds of those who were fleeing of those who were intent upon the chase!

Meanwhile Leila and Klodissa had remained upon the eminence where they had been left, and whence so wide a range of view was commanded. With their eyes they followed Aladyn and Ibrahim as these two made the circuit of the immense quarry, across which the looks of our heroine and the swarthy female could likewise travel towards the three horsemen, who, having emerged from the copse, were careering along on the farther side of the vast pit. Leila's heart palpitated with terror at the

thought of what might be the result of an encounter between her beloved Aladyn and the faithful Ibrahim on one side, against the odds of three desperate individuals on the other;—and when in a few minutes the report of fire-arms reached her ears, Klodissa saw she became pale as death.

It must be remembered that although we stated that it was the last ray of the setting sun which had revealed Tunar to Aladyn, when the former was yet in the midst of effecting his escape,—yet that all the subsequent incidents had followed each other with such startling rapidity, that not above a dozen minutes or so had elapsed since that expiring beam was flung from behind the hills of the Caucasus. Thus, although the twilight was so very short in that Georgian region, there was still a sufficient clearness to render all objects visible even at a distance. But amidst the smoke of the several weapons that were fired, the actual circumstances of the conflict were hidden from the view of Leila and Klodissa; and when that smoke cleared off, they beheld four riders careering swiftly away, in another moment to be lost in the gathering gloom of evening. One therefore had fallen:—who was that *one*?

"Let us speed to the spot!" cried Leila, her heart fluttering with the most anxious fears: and away she urged her steed, in company with Klodissa.

A few minutes brought them to the spot where the one who had fallen lay:—his right leg was beneath the steed that was as motionless as its master. Either dead or unconscious was that man: but Leila was in a moment re-

lieved from an immensity of apprehension; for though she at first caught not a glimpse of his countenance, yet a glance at his apparel showed that he was *not* her much-loved Aladyn.

The Star of Mingrelia and Klodissa glided from their steeds to render help to a fellow-creature, if it were not too late, and whoever he might be: but at the first glance which they bent upon his countenance Klodissa ejaculated, "Just heaven! it is Kyri!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SPOT NEAR THE QUARRY.

BE it recollected that the Princess Leila had never hitherto seen the countenance of Kyri Karaman; for he had worn a mask when he penetrated into her chamber at the hostelry for the purpose of obtaining possession of her ring: and though Klodissa now only ejaculated a portion of his name, yet did our heroine feel instantaneously smitten with the conviction that it was the formidable Guerilla bandit whom she beheld stretched before her.

"But he lives!" exclaimed Klodissa, at the expiration of a few moments, during which she had bent her countenance closely down to his own. "He breathes! Perhaps he was but stunned by the fall?—for his horse has evidently been shot under him!"

Then Klodissa rapidly and keenly ran her eyes over Kyri Karaman's form and perceiving no blood oozing out anywhere, she said in a low voice, "No—he is not wounded!"

Leila was all nervousness and agitation at having been thus sud-

denly thrown in with the Guerilla-bandit: for although he were at present unconscious of what was passing around him, yet was it impossible to say how speedily he might return to life—how he might start up—and how he might do her some mischief. It was natural that the Star of Mingrelia, knowing full well how desperate a character was Kyri Karaman, should thus be full of vague wild apprehensions at being brought suddenly into contact with him. For the delicately minded female who in her pathway beholds a reptile stretched torpid or seeming dead, cannot repel a feeling of repugnance, nor shake off a sensation of dread lest it should suddenly become inspired with life and fling its loathsome length at her.

"Assist me, dear Princess," said Klodissa, "to lift him from beneath the steed which is crushing one of his limbs. You know that he is a fellow-creature," continued the swarthy female, fixing her large dark eyes earnestly upon our heroine; "and however bad he may be, we must not suffer him——"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the generous-hearted Leila, anticipating the remainder of the sentence; "we must not suffer him to languish painfully—much less to perish miserably—for want of that assistance which common humanity would render to the worst and to the lowest!"

Leila and Klodissa accordingly managed to disencumber the fallen bandit's limb from the weight which was pressing upon it; and he then groaned heavily. But still he was unconscious of what was passing around him; and his eyes

remained closed. Klodissa hastily passed her hand down the limb which had lain beneath the steed; then more slowly she felt to ascertain if a bone were broken. She gently raised it—the bandit groaned again; but Klodissa expressed her conviction that the leg was not broken, though it might be bruised to an extent which produced great physical anguish.

At this moment the sounds of a horse's hoofs rapidly approaching reached the ears of the Princess and Klodissa; and though the gloom was now deepening around them, yet while the horseman was still at some little distance they both recognised Hafiz. He had been to the fortalice to warn the authorities of Tunar's proceedings with a view to flight: he had reached the gate when the first reports of the musketry were ringing through the air; and he had tarried a little while to learn the result. On returning to the eminence where he had left his fellow-travellers, in order that he might communicate the fact that Tunar had succeeded in accomplishing his escape,—he found that the spot was deserted: but convinced that the party had not entered Tiflis, he had ridden about at random in search of them, until in a few minutes he discerned some persons a little way off; and he now therefore came up to the spot where the Princess and Klodissa were bending over Kyri Karaman.

"Hush! not a word!—breathe not his name, dear Princess!" said Klodissa, in a low, hurried, but earnest manner: "for Hafiz knows him not!—and your Highness would scarcely——"

"No—I would not wilfully do

this man an injury," replied the Star of Mingrelia emphatically: for at the moment she recollected the solemn pledge which she had given to this effect to Myrrha.

The next instant Hafiz had sprung from his horse, in wild alarm lest the prostrate individual should either be his beloved master or Ibrahim: but on perceiving some one whom he knew not, he said, "May it please your Highness, who is this? and where——"

"His Excellency your master and your friend Ibrahim," Klodissa hastened to exclaim, "are gone in pursuit of Tunar. That youth has others with him: they are desperate men—there may be a conflict——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Hafiz, his hand instantaneously clutching his horse's mane in readiness to spring into his saddle: "if my services be not wanted here, I will speed whither they may be actively employed!"

"Go, good Hafiz," said Leila. "Your master may need the succour of your arm."

One bound, and Hafiz was in his saddle. Leila indicated the direction in which he was to proceed; and away sped the faithful and chivalrous Turk as quickly as his horse could bear him. Leila had bidden him depart for two reasons. In the first place because she was anxious that her well-beloved Aladyn should be as well supported as possible against the desperadoes with whom he might have to deal: and in the second place she saw that Klodissa was for some reason or another desirous that Hafiz should be temporarily gotten rid of—for she had given him to understand that

Tunar had several persons with him, whereas he had really but one. After the many obligations which the Princess had received at the hands of Klodissa, it was no wonder she should thus strive to humour her or to further her views, whatever they might be to the extent of her power.

"If Hafiz had chanced to discover who this is," said Klodissa, when he had taken his departure, "he would have felt himself bound to adopt stringent measures with respect to him. But I, dear Princess, was acquainted with the ill-fated Myrrha, as you likewise were acquainted with her: and for her sake—for the memory of that unfortunate being who was cut off in the bloom of her years—I would save this man if possible: for I know how tenderly and devotedly she loved him!"

"And I likewise, for the same reasons," answered Leila, sadly and mournfully, as she thought of Myrrha, "would not merely refrain from doing Kyri Karaman an injury, but would even endeavour to ensure his safety. Yet what is to be done? He is still unconscious: and who knows but that some of the Russian soldiery, if speeding in pursuit of Tunar, may come this way? Ah, Tunar!" exclaimed the Princess, her thoughts now suddenly settling again on one from whom for some minutes past they had been turned into another channel: "Kyri Karaman must have been in some way instrumental in aiding his escape!"

"For heaven's sake," ejaculated Klodissa. "let us not waste precious time in idle conjectures. Oh!

if I dared ask you a boon, dear Princess——"

"Ask me anything," eagerly responded the Star of Mingrelia. "I am not unmindful of how much I owe you—my honour, my happiness—nay, more, my very life!"

"The unfortunate Kyri Karaman," resumed Klodissa, hastily and excitedly, "shows no sign of returning consciousness: and we have not here the means of resuscitating him. Speed, dear Princess, to the nearest mill—procure wine, spirits—anything in short——"

"Enough, Klodissa! I understand!" exclaimed Leila, ready and willing to perform a service which she regarded as so simple: and the next moment she was again in her saddle. "In a few minutes I shall return!"—and away she sped.

Though the shades of evening had now completely gathered in, yet the moon and stars were beginning to send forth their silver lustre; and all objects in the immediate neighbourhood were still plainly visible, though it was not so with objects at any distance. On Leila's right hand was the immense quarry, all gleaming white and ghastly like a tremendous riven sepulchre. A little on her left hand was the grotesque wind-mill,—its uncouth shape and its singularly-fashioned sweeps standing out in bold blackness against the starlit sky. Straight ahead were the tall towers of the fortalice, rearing themselves like sombre giants, and flinging still darker shadows across the maze of buildings which looked white in the moonbeams save where those deep shades remained. And farther beyond that gloomy edifice stretched

the Georgian capital, with its towers denoting the churches of Christians, and its minarets indicating the temples of the Mussulman,—architectural types of two distinct creeds—yet all alike pointing to the same heaven, as if indicative of the acknowledged power of one and the same God!

But not long had Leila to contemplate the scene thus spread before her; for the windmill was soon gained—and her summons at the door quickly brought forth an old man who by his whitened costume was evidently the miller himself. Leila's object was quickly explained: she required a little wine, spirit, or any cordial which he might happen to have in his habitation—and he should be liberally recompensed. But he was one of those who can do nothing without asking a multitude of questions. What was the wine for? did the fair young lady purpose to drink it upon the spot? Was she athirst? Would she honour him by dismounting and entering his dwelling? or did she need the wine for some poor sick person in the neighbourhood?

"Interrogate me not," she said, mildly yet firmly. "Give me in a bottle or flask whichever of the liquors you have to dispose of; and here is your remuneration."

The coin which she displayed made the old man bustle about to supply his customer's want; for he was anxious to earn it, and too eager to grasp it to waste time with any more questions. Entering his dwelling, he speedily reappeared with a small flask, which he placed in Leila's hand. She gave him the coin and then urged her steed briskly back to the spot

where she had left Klodissa and Kyri Karaman.

She reached that spot: a steed was standing there; but she failed to perceive at the first glance that it was *not* Klodissa's:—her astonishment and alarm were at once excited by beholding nothing of Klodissa herself. Yet there, upon the ground, lay stretched a form—the form of a man—motionless, as Kyri Karaman was when she had quitted the place a few minutes previously. But this was not the form of Kyri Karaman! Just heaven! was it possible?—or did her eyes deceive her? Oh no!—it was indeed all but too true what she fancied—all too real what she beheld!

For Klodissa and the Guerillabandit had disappeared: but there, stretched upon the spot, lay motionless—good God! perhaps dead—perhaps murdered—her own well-beloved cousin Aladyn!

CHAPTER XXX.

BY THE SIDE OF THE RIVULET.

IN order to enter upon the explanation of those mysteries with which the preceding chapter concluded, we must first speak of certain proceedings on the part of Klodissa. No sooner had Leila disappeared from her view when that amiable Princess road away towards the windmill, than Klodissa, with a remarkable display of strength, raised the unconscious form of Kyri Karaman and placed him across her steed. She then sprang into the saddle; and urging the horse at a rapid pace, sped away from the spot with the still inanimate Guerilla whom she had thus taken in her charge.

It was not, however, to any great distance that Klodissa proceeded; and she seemed to be looking out for some convenient place where she might adopt the means for his restoration to consciousness. In about twenty minutes she reached a little valley, in which there was a narrow limpid rill; and in a spot shaded by trees she halted. Alighting from the steed, she lifted off the form of the Guerilla-bandit, and deposited him upon the grass. She then dipped her kerchief in the crystal rivulet: she sprinkled the pure element upon Kyri Karaman's countenance; and she anxiously watched, as well as the obscurity of the shaded place which she had chosen would permit, for the slightest sign of returning life. For though the moon and stars were now shining, yet be it remembered that it was under the shade of the trees that Klodissa was thus pursuing her kind ministering offices; and therefore it was but dimly that she could scan the features of the Guerilla-bandit.

At length he slowly opened his eyes: spasms appeared to shoot through his frame, as if the process of revival was a painful one—as indeed it often in such circumstances. Words began to mingle with the sighs and gaspings that came up from his throat; but those words were at first spoken so lowly and incoherently that Klodissa could gather no meaning from them. By degrees, however, they acquired a sense and significance which became intelligible enough, though it was in broken and disjointed sentences that Kyri Karaman thus spoke.

"It was not Tunar!" he said:

"no—no! it was not Tunar! But he would not tell all the truth—he would not—he dared not! Ah, ah! as well, perhaps, he thought to die for the one charge as for another. No, he did not do it! It was—it was—Ah, poor old man! I did not mean that! No, no—I meant not that his blood should be spilt; His spectre has haunted me—yet 'twas not my hand that struck the blow. Not mine! Not mine! It was—it was—Djemzet! Djemzet did it—not I—not Tunar! Why did the poor old man suddenly appear? Ah! perhaps it was to save Leila. Yes, yes—to save her, as we carried her off! Insensate Tunar, to have lingered in the garden—to have suffered himself to be captured! Oh, my brain is in a whirl—my head aches—my thoughts are confused! What can have happened? Where am I? Is it a prison? Are chains upon my limbs?"

"No—you are free," murmured Klodissa, gently, as she bent over the bandit, whose head reposed upon her lap.

"Ah! who speaks?" said Kyri Karaman, another strong spasm shooting through his frame, as its symmetrical well-knit shape lay lengthways upon the grass. "Was it Myrrha's voice—"

"No," replied Klodissa, still more softly and gently than before, though in accents as tremulously clear as the rippling of the rivulet which flowed at her feet; "you know that Myrrha has gone hence, and that you will never see her more!"

"Yes—she is gone!—the angel of my life is gone!" murmured Kyri Karaman; "the only being whom I ever loved, and whom I shall never see again!"

There was then a long silence,—during which the Guerilla was slowly and painfully collecting his thoughts as the light of reason became proportionately stronger and stronger. But still he had not sufficient strength to move—nor a sufficiently clear comprehension of the most recent circumstances which had occurred to him to put any questions to Klodissa. And Klodissa herself continued to support Kyri Karaman's head upon her lap, and to bend over him, as she kept the moistened kerchief laid across his brows, so that his brain might be cooled and the aching of his head mitigated.

"Someone spoke to me of Myrrha," at length said Kyri Karaman, again slowly breaking silence. "Ah, poor Myrrha!"

"If the love of Myrrha still be sweet unto your heart," murmured Klodissa, "and if her image still linger thus in your memory, wherefore do you pursue a course which is constantly raising up perils in your path? Do you not reflect that if it be permitted to the departed Myrrha to look down upon you from that world to which she has gone, it must sadden her to behold the criminality and the danger of your ways? Ah! who can tell but that *this* is the punishment which she experiences in another sphere for the misdeeds of which she was guilty in this?—and who can tell but that her happiness might be complete if she only saw that you, whom she has left upon that earth where she loved you so tenderly and so well, were pursuing a career of honour and of probity?"

"Who is it that thus speaks to me?" asked Kyri Karaman; "or

is it all a dream? Is it veritably the low soft voice of a woman which thus steals upon my ears, speaking things to which those ears are so little accustomed?—or is it all a delusion?"

"It is no delusion that you are in the care of one who for the departed Myrrha's sake has brought you to a place of safety, and who is ministering unto you. To me your late wife," continued Klodissa "was well known before she became your bride. Yes, Kyri Karaman, I loved her—and knowing how well she loved you, I am doing all this for her sake!"

"And who are you?" asked the Guerilla-bandit, endeavouring to raise himself up so as to obtain a better view of her who was thus supporting his head, and who was speaking in tones so soft and gentle; for as her countenance bent over him in the shade of those trees, he could only catch a dim and indistinct idea of her dusky-complexioned lineaments.

"Repose where you are for a few minutes longer," she said; "and then measures shall be taken to ensure your safety."

"If it be for Myrrha's sake," said Kyri Karaman, with a considerable degree of emotion, "that you, whomsoever you may be, manifest all this kindness towards me—then does the love of my departed angel shed its influence upon me even yet! But tell me who you are—tell me your name, that I may hereafter recollect it with gratitude!"

"Little would it matter to you," responded Klodissa, "to learn my name; for you know me not—you never saw me until now.

Though a dweller in these Caucasian climes, I am a native of a far off land—a province of the sun, where the complexion of the inhabitants is darkness indeed in comparison with the fair skins of the people of these regions. Yet from mine infancy have I been a dweller in Georgia; and in past years your beloved and lost Myrrha was my friend. But as for my name—or who I may be—or wither I am now going, it lists not *you* to know!"

"Ah, I understand!" said the Guerilla, with some degree of bitterness in his tone: "you would be ashamed that your name should ever be breathed in the presence of others by the lips of the bandit Kyri Karaman!"

There was again a long interval of silence,—during which the Guerilla felt his physical strength returning and his mental faculties becoming more collected. But still he lay in that position, with his head on Klodissa's lap; for there was still a sufficiency of lingering dreaminess in his thoughts to indulge in the idea that the influence of Myrrha's love was shed upon him: and there was a soft ecstasy in that idea—for the reader knows how well and how tenderly, despite all his failings, he had loved her whom he had lost. But at length he again broke silence, as he now slowly raised himself up to a sitting posture.

"At least suffer me," he said, "to behold more plainly the countenance of her who is testifying so much kindness towards me—so that if ever it should happen that you have need of friendly succour, and I should chance to be near at the time, I may prove all my

gratitude by wielding a weapon in your defence."

Klodissa rose up to her feet: Kyri Karaman rose likewise; and though he staggered and stood unsteadily upon his limbs for a few moments, yet did he soon regain the power of sustaining himself as usual.

"See!" said Klodissa, in a low gentle voice as before: "you know me not!"—and she suffered him to gaze upon her countenance.

But it was still beneath the shade of the trees that this scene took place; and the over-arching bows shut out the beams of moon and stars. Kyri Karaman contemplated that countenance, for a few moments; then all of a sudden, as if smitten by some strange or wild idea, he seized Klodissa by the hand; and the next instant he had dragged her forward so that the argentine splendour of the night now streamed fully upon her features. Indescribable was the expression which suddenly appeared upon the bandit's own countenance; and a wild cry rang from his lips.

But then it seemed as if all in a moment some delusion through which he had been passing were abruptly dispelled—as if some vision in which his senses had been carried onward were in a moment dissipated. For Klodissa glided away from him as if she were a fleeting ghost; his eyes followed her for an instant—and she vanished amongst the trees. Kyri Karaman was transfixed to the spot: he had not the power to follow her. Bewilderment and perplexity held him there motionless as a statue. He felt as if he were a somnambulist slowly

awakening from a dream in which he had been wandering ; and he was even frightened as if surrounded by unearthly things and strange superstitions. Thus several minutes elapsed ere he became sufficiently master of himself to control his ideas and to collect his thoughts.

But no!—it was not a dream through which he had been hurried—no delusion of the imagination. For there stood the steed on which Klodissa had brought him from the spot where he had sustain the accident that had rendered him the object of her care : and there, upon the grass, lay the moistened kerchief which had fallen from his brows ! He rushed wildly about in every direction, looking for Klodissa : there was a maddened celerity in his pace—the effect of the most powerful excitement, and which seemed as if the vivid energy of the mind had imparted a kindred galvanism to the form which but a short while back was so helpless. Yet nothing of Klodissa could he see ; and speeding back to the spot where the steed was quietly banqueting upon the grass, he leapt upon its back. Then he galloped about in every direction in the hope of finding her who had disappeared as if with such magical strangeness : but still all in vain ! The nature of the country was however such that it was only too easy for her to elude his pursuit, especially as she had many minutes' start of him before he had even thought of commencing his wild search on foot : for there were copses interspersed about—there was a wood stretching for upwards of a mile—there were hills and valleys—and there were some few insulated habitations, in any one of

which the swarthy-complexioned fugitive might have found refuge.

But leaving Kyri Karaman for the present, we must return to the spot where we left Leila at the instant when she discovered that Klodissa and the bandit had disappeared, and that Aladyn lay stretched senseless on the ground. The Princess, springing from her steed, threw herself upon her knees in a half-distracted state by the side of her cousin : but soon regaining her self-possession, she endeavoured to ascertain whether he yet lived. Yes!—his lips were wavering—he breathed a name—it was her own name—that of Leila—which thus came forth gaspingly and sighingly from his throat ! The Princess gave vent to a cry of joy on finding that he lived ; and bethinking herself of the wine she had purchased from the miller, she hastened to apply to Aladyn's lips the flask which contained it. To her infinite delight his revival was now rapid ; and in a few minutes his consciousness was completely restored. His arms were thrown round Leila's neck ; and he embraced her tenderly.

She now perceived that the horse which was standing upon the spot at the moment she came up to it on her return from the mill, was not Klodissa's, but Aladyn's own steed. Our young hero's own explanations were speedily given. He and Ibrahim had succeeded in overtaking Tunar, whom they had promptly made their prisoner,—his capture being effected indeed without the slightest difficulty, for he was unarmed and could offer no resistance. The other individual (whom the reader knows to have been

Djemzet) had succeeded in effecting his escape. Soon after Aladyn and Ibrahim had captured Tunar—whom they were conducting back towards Tiflis—they had been joined by Hafiz. This Osmanli informed them that he had left Leila and Klodissa ministering to the individual who had been stunned by the force with which he was thrown to the ground when his horse was shot under him. Aladyn considered it to have been indiscreet on the part of Hafiz to leave the Princess and Klodissa alone with that desperado,—though he was very far from suspecting that he might be Kyri Karaman. He did not however tarry to express his displeasure at the thoughtless conduct of his younger follower,—especially as he was well aware that it arose from the most faithful devotion towards himself. But leaving Tunar in the custody of Ibrahim and Hafiz, Aladyn galloped forward to rejoin the Princess and Klodissa. He thought to himself that if the desperado, whosoever he were, should be restored to complete consciousness, he might offer insult or outrage to Leila and the swarthy female notwithstanding the generous ministrations they had bestowed upon him. Away therefore he sped at full career: but on drawing nigh the spot where he expected to find the objects of his search, he distinguished them not; and therefore fancied that he had mistaken the neighbourhood of the place and that it must be still farther off. All of a sudden his horse swerved and shied violently at a black object which lay upon the ground; and skilful an equestrian though

Aladyn were, he was flung with force from his saddle. The object which had caused this accident was none other than Kyri Karaman's steed that lay dead upon the ground. Aladyn had been stunned by his fall—but, as we have seen, he was far more speedily recovered on that spot than Kyri Karaman was on another. He had sustained no actual injury beyond a few severe bruises; and in five minutes after his restoration to consciousness he was enabled to think of departure from the place.

He had already inquired concerning Klodissa; and Leila now explained to him everything that had happened—so that Aladyn speedily shared in her astonishment and grief at the disappearance of the swarthy female. But when Aladyn heard that the desperado was none other than Kyri Karaman, he was still more deeply afflicted; and he exclaimed, "Alas, our poor Klodissa! she has fallen into the power of that unscrupulous bandit!"

But what was to be done? Despite all the chivalry of his disposition, Aladyn was suffering too much from the contusions he had received to be enabled to speed in pursuit. Besides, his horse was by this time completely knocked up; and this he knew must likewise be the case with the animals which his followers rode. And even if it were otherwise, in what direction could pursuit be instituted? what effective search could be carried on in those hours when the obscurity of night was struggling against the lustre of moon and stars? There was no help for it but to abandon Klodissa to her fate—at least for the present. Yet

this conclusion was not arrived at without many regrets on the part alike of Leila and of Aladyn: and it was therefore in sadness on the swarthy female's account that, having mounted their steeds, they took their way into Tiflis.

They arrived at the house which had belonged to the unfortunate Mansour, expecting that probably they might obtain an asylum there: but if it should prove otherwise, they had decided upon repairing to the best hostelry in the city. They were not however compelled to have recourse to this latter alternative; for all the domestics of the late Mansour were still at the dwelling; and by them were Leila and Aladyn received with a most joyous welcome. The matron-housekeeper was amongst the first to hail their presence with delight: and then in a few moments Leila was embraced in the arms of her faithful and overjoyed dependants, Zaida and Emima. This was truly an affecting scene. The Princess forgot the etiquette of rank and station: the two damsels forgot likewise the great social distinction which separated them from Leila. In the luxury of those first minutes of their meeting it was as if friends had met: it was a beloved mistress who was restored to her hitherto disconsolate but now rejoicing handmaidens—it was two faithful and devoted damsels who with ecstatic effusion were welcoming the return of that beloved mistress. And how much had Leila to tell Zaida and Emima!—what wondrous adventures to describe—what perils and afflictions to speak of—what kind friends to mention—what successful escapes to afford

a subject for congratulation! It was only however the most slightly outlined sketch which the Princess could at first give; and it was not until the following day that she found an opportunity of entering into minuter details.

The kind attentions of the matron-housekeeper soon caused a tempting little banquet to be served up, to which Aladyn and Leila sat down: but though some hours had elapsed since last they tasted food, yet they were unable to do justice to the delicacies now set before them—their minds were again sorely grieved as they thought of Klodissa. After the lapse of some little while, a domestic entered, with the announcement that Ibrahim and Hafiz had just arrived at the mansion, having re-consigned Tunar to the gaol from which he had escaped. Then again a little which elapsed—and the door of the apartment presently opening, Klodissa made her appearance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KLODISSA'S RETURN.

THE reader will recollect that we stated there were several isolated dwellings interspersed about the district where Klodissa had so suddenly vanished from the view of Kyri Karaman. We wish to leave not upon that reader's mind the slightest impression that there was anything supernatural in the disappearance of the swarthy female: but all circumstances tended to facilitate her flight and her subsequent elusion of pursuit. The few minutes which elapsed ere Kyri Karaman began to search for

her, enabled her to accomplish a considerable distance,—the more so inasmuch as she glided onward with exceeding swiftness. She soon reached one of the little cottage habitations above referred to; and there, by the aid of the coin whereof she had a plentiful supply about her, she procured the loan of a horse to take her to Tiflis.

Infinite was the joy of Leila and Aladyn when they beheld Klodissa enter the apartment in which they were seated. The arms of the Princess were quickly folded about the neck of her to whom she lay under such immense obligations: Aladyn expressed his liveliest pleasure at her restoration to safety and liberty; and both our hero and heroine were anxious to learn the adventures which had befallen her. Klodissa seated herself at the table; and having partaken of some little refreshment, whereof she stood much in need, she began to give her own fictitious version of recent occurrences in the following manner:—

"Not many minutes had elapsed, dear Princess, after you left me on your visit to the windmill, when a party of four horsemen, coming from quite the opposite direction draw near. They halted upon beholding me bending over the inanimate form of a man; and they speedily discovered that he was Kyri Karaman. It proved that they were retainers of his: he was therefore lifted upon the steed of one of them; and despite my vehement protestations and entreaties, they determined that I should accompany them. How did they know but that I was in some way or another playing their leader

a perfidious game?—or if he were to die, would it not be requisite for them to learn from my lips the circumstances which had brought him to his present condition? It was thus that they spoke. Their actions were prompt—I was compelled to mount my steed and to depart with them. It was all the work of but a few moments; and while proceeding rapidly along, I was poignantly afflicted with the thought of what would be your consternation and alarm, dear Princess, when on returning to the spot you would find that I had thus unaccountably disappeared. The horsemen pursued their way to some distance; and at length they halted on the brink of a rivulet. There they began to adopt the requisite measures to recover Kyri Karaman; and when life was returning—but before he had regained his reasoning faculties—he gave utterance to a variety of broken and disjointed sentences. Yet those sentences were significant of startling things: they conveyed an important revelation. In short, Tunar is innocent of the death of Mansour!—the murderer of the worthy merchant was a person bearing the name of Djemzet!"

"Tunar innocent?" ejaculated Aladyn; while Leila's looks expressed the utmost astonishment.

"Yes, he is innocent!" responded Klodissa emphatically: "and great though his misdeeds in other respects may be, his soul is at least not stained with this odious and abhorrent crime."

"And the falsely accused youth is again in custody!" cried Aladyn. "I and one of my followers arrested him!"

"In that case," observed Klodissa, "we must adopt speedy measures to clear his character of the charge, and do him an act of justice."

"Oh, yes!" cried Aladyn: "that shall indeed be done! But you gleaned all this from the lips of Kyri Karaman?"

"Yes," responded Klodissa: "for it would seem that Kyri Karaman and Djemzet were the two individuals who, invading the sanctity of Mansour's dwelling, carried you off—dear Princess—and representing themselves as your brothers, basely sold you to the slave-dealer Mustapha Yakoub."

"Kyri Karaman again my persecutor!" exclaimed Leila: "and I who so faithfully pledged his dying wife——"

"Kyri Karaman is a wretch," ejaculated Aladyn with vehement indignation, "who deserves no mercy and no compassion at the hands of any!"

"Hear the remainder of my narrative," said Klodissa. "Many things in his ravings, ere he regained complete consciousness, did Kyri Karaman give utterance to—fully proving that though Tunar was an accomplice in the base treachery that was to hand your Highness over to Mustapha Yakoub, yet that he was entirely innocent of the death of Mansour. His presence in the garden on that memorable night is thus satisfactorily accounted for: he was doubtless there to see that the treacherous project was carried into execution. And be it well understood that although the treacherous design itself led to the murder of the old merchant, yet that Kyri Karaman was as

guiltless as Tunar of the foul deed or of any intention to perpetrate it. The man Djemzet committed it—he only!—and never shall I forget how in his ravings Kyri Karaman testified the affliction and horror which his soul experienced on account of that act of turpitude."

"But wherefore did not Tunar proclaim these facts at the time?" exclaimed Aladyn.

"I think that his motives for maintaining silence on the point can be easily fathomed," responded Klodissa. "To have proclaimed the truth, would have been necessarily accompanied by such explanations in corroboration thereof as would have shown that he was an accomplice in the treacherous scheme for the forcible abduction of the Princess. This latter crime is punished with *death* by the laws of Georgia,—the same that murder likewise is! Tunar would not therefore have amended his position: he would merely have substituted one capital crime for the other that was imputed to him. And then, too, there was the chance that the accusation of murder would not eventually be proven against him: whereas if he had confessed the other crime of which he was really guilty, the tribunal would have at once, on his own admission, delivered its verdict and pronounced sentence. Finally he doubtless entertained the hope that Kyri Karaman would befriend and aid him to effect his escape from incarceration if he held his peace: and thus in every respect was it Tunar's interest to do so."

"Those reasonings are conclusive," said Aladyn. "And now continue your own narrative, Klodissa,—that narrative which we

have already often enough interrupted."

"While Kyri Karaman was giving vent to his unconscious ravings," proceeded the handsome, swarthy-complexioned female, "the four men were doing all they could to bring him back to complete life; and they seemed for awhile to forget my presence. But when they had succeeded, they suddenly perceived me; and then they were desperately alarmed at the fact that I had overheard all which emanated from their chief's lips. To be brief, they vowed that they would kill me; and despite my passionate intercessions, my entreaties, my prayers, they were about to carry their dreadful project into execution, when Kyri Karaman—then fully restored to consciousness—interposed. He demanded how I came there?—and I explained how myself and your Highness had been ministering to him on the spot where he was stunned by the fall from his horse. He then offered me my life on condition that I would to the best of my ability endeavour to have the fact kept secret that he was one of those who had carried off your Highness and sold you to the slave-dealer. Ah! without knowing how such a pledge could possibly be kept—but ready to promise anything to save my life—I vowed that if it were indeed possible his name should be suppressed in any public mention that might be made of that transaction. He thereupon suffered me to depart in safety,—restoring me my steed, and offering me an escort, which latter proposal I however thought fit to decline. Overjoyed at my escape, I sped away; but not

far had I proceeded when my jaded horse fell, evidently to rise no more. Then I wandered to the nearest habitation, where I hired an animal—though a somewhat sorry one—to bring me into Tiflis."

Such was Klodissa's narrative,—the complete truth of which neither Aladyn nor Leila for an instant suspected. The swarthy female received renewed congratulations from our hero and heroine on her escape from the hands of such desperadoes; and then they all three deliberated on the course which was to be pursued in respect to Tunar.

"It is our duty," said Aladyn, "to exonerate him from the foul imputation of murder—though so far as his actual position goes, it will be a benefit conferred on his character only: for according to the Georgian laws he must suffer death for his complicity in the outrage to yourself, dear Leila."

"Unless," added Klodissa, "the person who suffered from that outrage—her Highness, for instance—should sue for mercy on his behalf; and in that case he would receive but some slight punishment, or else be liberated altogether."

Leila reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "I will sue in his behalf! Great though the injury was which he inflicted upon me, and fatal as in its consequences it might have proved to the happiness of my life, yet I could not wish that a fellow-creature should suffer death on my account."

"Admirable Leila!" observed Aladyn, gazing upon his beloved

cousin with the fondest admiration.

"Besides," continued the Princess, the modest blushes suffusing her cheeks as her looks fell bashfully beneath those of Aladyn, "for an entire month has the wretched youth laboured under an imputation which after all was as unjust as it was horrible; and his case deserves a merciful consideration on that account. For we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that the crime of which he was accused so wrongfully is infinitely more hideous and consequently more blackening to the character than the one which he committed against myself, and which is as yet unknown to the authorities."

"But there is still another consideration in the youth's case of which we have lost sight," said Aladyn; "and it is one which may neutralize, dearest Leila, all your merciful, humane and generous intentions. I allude to his escape from prison; and if it be true, as Hafiz reported to me, that he dealt so hardly with the Russian corporal that the unfortunate man's life was despaired of when he was dragged forth from the moat it, will fare but badly with Tunar."

"The Russians," said Klodissa, "are in certain cases more lenient with Georgian natives than you might perhaps be inclined to suppose. This is through motives of policy; and if her Highness should prove so forgiving as she generously purposes to proclaim herself, the Russians will not suffer their own severity to stand out in too dark a contrast with that leniency."

After some additional deliberations the Princess, Aladyn, and

Klodissa separated for the night; and the charming Leila once more reposed in the chamber whence about a month back she had been snatched away to be sold as a slave and to become the favourite of the Ramazan.

We may avail ourselves of this opportunity to observe that the late Mansour's domestics had been suffered by that unfortunate merchant's executors to remain at the mansion until some purchaser should be found for it with all the effects it contained; for Mansour's eldest son, who had inherited it as his portion of the patrimony, had decided not to dwell in it, he being settled in Trebizonde. All Mansour's numerous family had assembled from various parts,—some who lived nearest, to attend the funeral obsequies—others who had arrived too late for that ceremony, to shed the tears of affliction over the sepulchre in which his remains were deposited. Then the members of that family, having received from the executors their respective portions of the vast fortune bequeathed amongst them, had returned to their respective homes. These things had all taken place during the month that had elapsed since the old merchant's death; and those members of the family who were the last to take their departure had only quitted the mansion a day or two before the principal characters of our tale returned to it again.

Before Aladyn retired to rest that night, he inquired of the steward of the household if any private papers addressed to himself or the Lady Leila (as she was still called beneath that roof) had been discovered amongst his deceased master's effects? The

steward declared his ignorance on the subject, and recommended Aladyn to apply to the executors for the information. Our hero was informed that the chief executor was a man of the law, of eminence and respectability and he therefore resolved to make his visit to that legal personage on the morrow serve a double purpose.

Accordingly, at as early an hour as Aladyn thought he might be likely to obtain an interview with the distinguished lawyer, he proceeded to that individual's abode. He was at once received by the man of business, who was an elderly person, of urbane manners and kind disposition. To the question which our hero first put to him, the reply was in the negative: no private documents addressed to either the Lady Leila or to himself had been discovered amongst the deceased Mansour's effects. Aladyn was therefore compelled to come to the painful conclusion that the secret relative to the terrestrial paradise amidst the regions of the Caucasus had died with the murdered Mansour, and that as he was the sole depositor thereof at the time, it was now for ever lost! Sad as Aladyn's emotions were at this disappointment, he nevertheless concealed them to the best of his ability, for fear lest he should be questioned by the legal personage relative the cause of whatever chagrin he experienced.

Aladyn next proceeded to consult the lawyer with reference to the course that ought to be pursued in respect to Tunar. He put the legal personage in possession of all the main facts of the case,—suppressing however the name of Kyri

Karaman, out of deference to the pledge which he firmly believed Klodissa to have given to that individual. The lawyer listened with the utmost attention: but we must leave to the ensuing chapter a description of the proceedings that were taken and of their result. X.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE EXAMINATION.

THE lawyer at once proceeded with Aladyn to the residence of the Georgian magistrate who had taken cognizance of the crime committed at Mansour's house: but this functionary, on receiving an outline of the new particulars which had transpired, resolved to refer the whole matter to the Russian authorities in Tiflis. To the abode of the chief Russian judge did the lawyer and Aladyn accordingly betake themselves: and this official at once entertained the business. Having listened to the statement which was made to him, he decided upon hearing the whole case which concerned Tunar at one o'clock in the afternoon of that same day,—on which occasion the requisite witnesses were to be produced.

In the meanwhile Klodissa had issued forth from the deceased merchant's house; and closely veiled she had bent her way to the prison. On reaching the gates of the gloomy frowning fortalice, she made an inquiry relative to the Russian corporal whom Tunar had so violently assaulted when effecting his escape. She learnt that the man was progressing favourably, and that his life was no

longer despaired of. She then asked if it were possible for her to obtain a few minutes' interview with the prisoner Tunar?—and at the same time she slipped a piece of gold into the hand of the Russian soldier to whom she was addressing herself. The effect was magically instantaneous; for the soldier assured Klodissa that there was no difficulty in granting her request. He accordingly summoned the gaoler, in whose ear he whispered a few words intimating that the lady paid liberally and would doubtless remunerate him for his trouble; so that the grim functionary displayed all possible alacrity in forwarding Klodissa's object. Provided with his keys, he conducted her through a courtyard, and unlocked a small but massive and deep-set door at the foot of the tower, up which there was a spiral staircase. Klodissa followed him to a considerable height; he halted at length—opened another door—and bade the lady pass into the place with which it communicated. He added that he should remain outside the door, which would not be secured upon her, and that therefore she might issue forth again at any moment she thought fit.

Klodissa found herself in a short corridor formed of massive masonry at the extremity of which there was an open archway; and this led into a small vaulted chamber—where Tunar, heavily ironed, was seated upon a wretched pallet. The light was admitted by two small loopholes, through either of which it was impossible for a human form to pass: for since his recapture, every precaution was adopted to prevent a repetition of

the youth's daring escape. Thus he was lodged in a place far more secure than his former cell had been; and shackles were fixed upon his limbs.

Tunar's countenance was very pale; and its expression was that of the deepest despondency. He had expected that the approaching visitor was the chaplain of the prison: but on beholding a female closely veiled, he started up, his chains rattling with the movement.

"I bring you good tidings," said Klodissa, at once opening her business in this cheering manner: you may entertain the hope of saving your life if you will be guided by my instructions!"

"Is this possible?" murmured the youth, his countenance becoming all in an instant animated with the joyous hope that was inspired in his heart. "Oh! if it be not otherwise than a dream, tell me what I am to do—and I will implicitly obey you! But who is it that comes to speak to me of hope?"

"No matter who I may be," responded Klodissa; "suffice it for you to know that I am telling you the exact truth. And as a token thereof, I will at once inform you that many circumstances hitherto involved in mystery have come to my knowledge. It was not *your* hand which dealt the murderous blow at the unfortunate Mansour. It was that of Djemzet, the dependent of Kyri Karaman!"

"Yes—it is true!—by heaven it is true!" ejaculated Tunar. "But what avail would it have been for me to proclaim that fact——"

"I comprehend," interrupted Klodissa, "all the motives which placed a seal upon your lips. You

were an accomplice in the forcible abduction of the Princess Leila; and those who executed the deed were Kyri Karaman and Djemzet."

"That again is true!" exclaimed Tunar, joyous that his innocence of the murder should thus have transpired, but wondering how all the circumstances that were being named to him could have got to the knowledge of his visitress.

"You must now give me," continued Klodissa, "a true and faithful answer to the question which I am about to put to you: for in respect to your eventual safety everything depends upon my obtaining a perfect knowledge of all the particulars of your case."

"It were therefore an act of utter madness on my part," quickly replied Tunar, "to deal with you deceitfully! Question me—and my answers shall be given as if I were speaking to an angel sent from heaven!"

"Tell me, then," said Klodissa,—"wherefore did Kyri Karaman become an accomplice—or rather I should say, a principal agent in carrying off the Princess Leila? It could not possibly have been for the price which Mustapha Yakoub paid for her; because Kyri Karaman is rich—he has treasures in his strongholds amidst the mountains——"

"He once had, lady," interjected Tunar: "but he has lost them all; and it was therefore for the sake of Mustapha Yakoub's gold——"

"Lost them all?" ejaculated Klodissa. "But this is impossible! Is he not the chief of a band——"

"He was, lady," replied Tunar: "but for upwards of a month past he had ceased to be so. And now

you are speaking of him as if he were still alive—whereas he met his death last evening, in his endeavour to aid my escape."

"No—he lives, and is free," rejoined Klodissa. "He was but stunned with his fall—and I have the most positive knowledge that he subsequently eluded pursuit and got off in safety. But how came it that he ceased to be the chief of a powerful band, and that he was reduced to such a strait as to earn the gold of a slave-dealer?"

"His lieutenant Khazi revolted against him," answered Tunar: "other members of the band accepted the rebel as their leader—and Kyri Karaman suddenly found himself dispossessed alike of rank and riches. One follower alone remained faithful—and this was Djemzet."

"Ah! was it so?" ejaculated Klodissa: and she reflected in silence for upwards of a minute. "Now listen to me," she at length continued. "Measures have been taken to demonstrate your innocence in respect to the assassination of the merchant Mansour. You will doubtless be shortly examined in the presence of some judicial authority: you will have to confess your complicity in the carrying-off of the Princess Leila—whom you are not to speak of as a princess, but simply as the Lady Leila——"

"And of what avail to me," interrupted Tunar, "will it be to have my innocence of one crime disproved, if I plead guilty to another which carries with it the same capital penalty?"

"All this is duly cared for," responded Klodissa. "The Princess Leila will intercede on your

behalf—she is merciful and generous, kind and forgiving——”

“The Princess Leila!” ejaculated Tunar, in astonishment: “is she not, then, at Constantinople?”

“No—she has escaped—and she is in Tiflis,” answered Klodissa. “Pure and immaculate as when she was borne away has she returned. And she will intercede for you; and according to the Georgian laws your punishment will be light, even if you be not pardoned altogether—for such is the usage when the female against whom an outrage has been committed refuses to stand forward as an accuser.

“Oh! then, there is indeed hope!” exclaimed Tunar, clasping his manacled hands in a wild frenzy of joy. But you to whom I am thus indebted for my life——”

“Question me not—but listen,” interrupted Klodissa. “You must sacredly pledge yourself to me that henceforth you will never, for any consideration that may transpire, concert the slightest mischief against that amiable Princess. In terms the most binding and solemn which you can possibly find whereinto pledge yourself, must you give me this vow!”

“May the vengeance of heaven alight upon my head if I break it!” exclaimed Tunar; “may the Almighty’s thunders smite me down!—may his lightning wither me! Now, lady, are you satisfied?”

“I am,” replied Klodissa; “because I cannot for a moment believe that, capable of much wickedness though you are, you would violate such an oath as this.”

“No—I would not!” ejaculated Tunar with emphasis.

“But I require yet another pledge from your lips,” continued Klodissa,—“a pledge to be attested as solemnly and sacredly as the vow which you have just made. It is that you will never again ally yourself in any way with Kyri Karaman—that you will never henceforth hold the slightest intercourse with him, either to lend yourself to his own designs or to suggest schemes of evil unto him. And moreover, you must swear that you will never avail yourself of your knowledge of his secrets to work him an injury—much less to betray him into the hands of justice for the sake of the reward which has been set upon his head. To all this must you swear!”

Tunar took this second oath in terms as sacred and solemn as those which he had adopted in reference to the former; and Klodissa again expressed herself satisfied.

“I have already said,” she continued, “that in all probability you will be examined before a judge within a very brief space of time. But you must not mention the name of Kyri Karaman! Proclaim that of Djemzet—proclaim it loudly and emphatically as that of the murderer of the venerated Mansour!—and bestow any fictitious name that you may think fit upon his companion at the time; but breathe not the real name of Kyri Karaman! It were odious that one who has been the chief of a gallant band, should be known to have dwindled down into the kidnapper of a defenceless lady! Besides, if you were to proclaim that you had for any purpose leagued yourself with

Kyri Karaman, both Georgian and Russian Judges—whichsoever you may be brought before—would harden their hearts against you, and deal most severely in the infliction of the penalties.”

“Rest assured, lady, replied Tunar, “that I shall not deviate one tittle from the instructions which have issued from your lips!”

“Act in accordance with this resolve,” rejoined Klodissa; “and all will go well with you.”

She then issued from the cell,—never having once disturbed the thick veil which was over her countenance; so that Tunar remained utterly at a loss to conjecture who the visitress could be, or what might be her personal appearance. The turnkey again secured the massive door: and he conducted Klodissa to the gate of the fortalice. There she bestowed a liberal recompence upon him; and hastily taking her departure, she bent her steps towards the deceased merchant’s house.

Precisely at one o’clock in the afternoon of that day, Tunar was conducted by an escort of Russian soldiers to the tribunal, where the chief Russian Judge took his seat. The only persons at first present in the Court, besides the Judge, were the clerks, and the lawyer whom Aladya had retained in the matter. Tunar was conducted into the justice-hall: but the escort of soldiers were directed to remain outside the door. In short, it was a secret examination that was about to take place.

“Prisoner,” said the Judge, when Tunar had entered the dock appropriated for felons, “is it your desire to make any statement in respect to the foul crime of which

you are charged—the assassination of your venerable and much respected master?”

“May it please your Excellency, replied Tunar, “I am innocent of that crime! I asserted my innocence at the moment when I was captured——”

“But from all I have learnt,” interrupted the Judge, “you have not since repeated the declaration—although during the month of your imprisonment you have been visited by the Governor and Chaplain of the fortalice on many occasions.”

“It was in the horror and anguish of the moment,” replied Tunar, “that in the first instance I repelled a charge of which I was innocent, and that I proclaimed the truth. But when in the solitude of a dungeon. I had leisure for reflection, it appeared to me useless to repeat averments which would require to be corroborated by many explanations and which explanations would of a necessity lead to the avowal of a deed carrying the same penalties which belong to the charge of murder.”

“To what deed do you refer?—and do you choose to give those explanations now?” inquired the Judge.

Although Tunar had as a matter of course, made up his mind how to act, yet he appeared to reflect for some moments: and then, with a sudden air of candour, he exclaimed, “Yes—I will reveal everything to your Excellency!”

“Speak!” said the Judge.

“There was a lady named Leila,” continued Tunar,—“a lady of matchless beauty, residing as a guest at Mansour’s house. A slave-dealer arrived in the neighbourhood of Tiflis; and I bargained

with him for the sale of the Lady Leila. I had two accomplices in the deed—one bearing the name of Djemzet, the other that of Gregoras. It was arranged for these two men to carry her off by night from Mansour's house: and at the hour appointed I descended into the garden to give them admission. While the act of abduction was being accomplished, I remained concealed amongst the trees to await its issue. It happened that Mansour came to walk in the garden at the very time; and he encountered Djemzet and Gregoras as they were bearing the Lady Leila away. Mansour raised a cry of alarm; and then all was still! I repaired to the spot where the encounter had taken place; and there I beheld my master weltering in his blood. In an agony of grief I threw myself upon his form; and hence the gory stains that appeared upon my garments. Then I was arrested—and now your Excellency knows all. But as there is a God above us, I am innocent of the death of my unfortunate master!"

"Let the prisoner be removed," said the Judge.

One of the clerks summoned the escort of soldiers, who conducted Tunar into a room adjoining judgment-hall, and where the clerk desired that he might be retained in close custody until further orders should be given relative to his disposal. The clerk then proceeded to another room, where Aladyn, with his two dependants—Leila, also with her faithful followers—and Klodissa, were assembled. The clerk beckoned Klodissa to accompany him; and he led her into the court of

justice. She raised her veil; and the few persons who were present in that judgment-hall were struck by the handsome though swarthy countenance which was revealed to their view.

"You will tell his Excellency," said the lawyer who had been retained by Aladyn, "whatsoever particulars you may have to communicate in respect to the matter of which his Excellency is taking cognizance."

"Last evening," said Klodissa, "I was returning into Tidis from a long journey, in company with some friends,—when we beheld a strange spectacle at the fortress-prison. Someone was escaping by means of a rope; and a member of our party was despatched to the gates of the gaol to give the alarm. But the prisoner succeeded in effecting his escape: he gained the wood—and thence we beheld him emerge, mounted on a fleet steed, and accompanied by two horsemen. Pursuit was at once instituted by the two remaining male members of our party; there was an encounter—a conflict—and one of the escaped Tunar's companions was hurled violently to the ground, his horse being shot under him. I and a lady who was with me proceeded to the spot; for we knew not at the time who had thus fallen. We found that the individual still lived, and that he was only deprived of consciousness. We ministered to him: the lady who was with me rode away to procure restoratives from an adjacent habitation; and while she was absent, several of the fallen man's comrades came up to the spot. They bore him and myself away with them. Presently they halted: he

began to recover—and in his ravings, while life was returning, he gave utterance to important facts. He proclaimed the innocence of Tunar in respect to the murder of Mansour; he declared also that himself and another had carried off the Lady Leila from Mansour's dwelling; and that it was this other who had dealt the fatal blow."

"Did he in his delirious wanderings," inquired the Judge, "name the individual whom he thus unconsciously proclaimed as the assassin?"

"Yes," said Klodissa; he said that the name was Djemzet."

"'Tis well," said the Judge. "Proceed."

"I have but a few more words to say," continued Klodissa; "and these are entirely of a personal character. The men who had borne me away in company with their injured comrade were for killing me when they found that I had overheard all his unwitting revelations; but he regained complete consciousness in time to frustrate their murderous intentions—I explained to him how it happened that I was there—and he suffered me to depart."

"It is sufficient," said the Judge, bowing courteously to Klodissa as an intimation that she might retire.

The clerk accompanied her from the court; and conducting her back to the room whence he had escorted her, he requested Leila to follow him. The Princess at once complied: Zaida and Emina made a movement to proceed with their mistress; but the clerk said, addressing himself to Leila, "You will consent, lady, to dispense with

our servitresses for a brief space, under existing circumstances. The nature of this case is so extraordinary from first to last, that his Excellency the Judge has deemed it expedient to investigate it with closed doors, and to examine all the witnesses individually and separately, as the only means of arriving at a just estimate of the real facts."

Leila bowed in acknowledgement of the justice of these observations; and she made a sign for Zaida and Emina to remain in the waiting-room. She then accompanied the clerk into the court; and when she raised her veil, her beauty produced a still greater effect upon those who thus beheld her countenance than that of Klodissa had previously done. Her looks were bent bashfully downward; a modest blush suffused her cheeks: she appeared most ravishingly lovely. The Judge—little suspecting that in this beautiful maiden he beheld the Princess Leila Dizila, the Star of Mingrelia—was nevertheless convinced that she was a lady occupying no mean social position; and he was prepared to give the most implicit credit to every syllable that might emanate from her lips. Indeed it was sufficient to gaze upon that angelic countenance to be convinced that truth and sincerity were the attributes of its fair possessor.

In compliance with the request of the lawyer retained by Aladyn, our heroine proceeded to state that she had been carried off from Mansour's house by two persons representing themselves as her brothers, and that Tunar was an accomplice in the deed. She

specified the time when the abduction took place—thus proving that it was on the same night as that of the murder of Mansour. She corroborated Klodissa's narrative as far as she was enabled, in respect to their joint ministration to the individual who had been thrown from his horse—the fact of her riding to the windmill to procure restoratives—and the circumstance of missing both the injured man and Klodissa herself on her return to the spot where she had left them. But she did not mention the name of Kyri Karaman; and this suppression she was enabled to maintain without the slightest violation of the truth. In respect to her escape from Constantinople, she simply stated that it was effected by the aid of Klodissa, but without entering into any further details of the proceeding itself—though she omitted not a warm eulogy of Klodissa's character.

"I congratulate you sincerely, lady," said the Judge,—“and those who hear me thus speak must in their hearts unite in that congratulation on your fortunate escape. The inhabitants of the Caucasian districts dwell under the protection of my Imperial master the Czar of all the Russias; and it is not to be tolerated that anyone in these climes should be dragged away by a vile slave-dealer belonging to the Ottoman nation. Let a decree of arrest be issued against the villain Mustapha Yakoub; so that if he be again found in Tiflis or its precincts, he may be brought to condign punishment.”

The head clerk made a memorandum of the Judge's mandate;

and his Excellency proceeded to say, “The prisoner Tunar has likewise rendered himself liable to all the penalties which the law of Georgia awards to those who abduct, or connive at the abduction of females from their homes.”

“With your Excellency's permission,” said Leila, the music of whose voice seemed to hover like a magical charm around the Judge, old man though he were, “I would fain intercede on behalf of that youth. Firmly believing that he is innocent of the dread crime of assassination which is imputed to him, I hold that he deserves some indemnification for having been subjected to such a terrible charge. Therefore, great though my wrongs have been, I can entertain merciful sentiments; and I respectfully appeal to this august tribunal that punishment may not be dealt on my behalf.”

In the same way that the Judge was from the first instant prepared to place implicit reliance on every syllable to which Leila might give utterance, so was he now equally willing to award any boon that she might demand at his hands. He therefore said, “Your conduct, lady, is in every way worthy of the highest commendation. You, who have been so much wronged, now become a forgiving angel; and when the attributes of heaven are thus reflected in an earthly maiden, it is not for those who sit in Judgment to display hardness of heart. “Lady,” added the Judge, with a most courteous smile, “fortunately your will is in accordance with the law, which in this case allows mercy to be shown at the intercession of the injured one; otherwise I am constrained to admit that

your will might possibly override the law."

Leila blushed modestly at the delicate compliment that was thus paid her; and with a graceful inclination of the head, she retired from the court. Aladyn was then summoned, to give an account of the precise circumstances attending Tunar's arrest in the garden of the deceased merchant's dwelling on the memorable night of the tragedy; and when he had withdrawn, the Judge ordered Tunar to be brought back into the Court. The youth again took his place in the dock; and the Judge, addressing him in a solemn manner, spoke as follows:—

"All the incidents of your case have been carefully and scrutinizingly investigated. In respect to the assassination of the venerable Mansour, your version of the tragedy has been fully borne out by the testimony of unimpeachable persons. You are therefore on that head acquitted and proclaimed innocent. With regard to the crime whereof you were guilty, in concerting and conniving at the forcible abduction of the Lady Leila, and selling her into slavery, this tribunal would have pronounced the severest penalties, were it not that the injured lady herself has most generously interceded on your behalf. Where so much mercy is shown by one who has been so deeply injured, the tribunal cannot by its harshness display a disagreeable contrast. On that head therefore you are pardoned and absolved. But there is another grave offence—or rather a complication of offences of which I have now to take cognizance. You endeavoured to evade the arm of justice—you

escaped from your prison—and in effecting that escape, you violently maltreated a soldier wearing the uniform of his Imperial Majesty, the Czar of all the Russias. I have a certificate before me to the effect that the injured man is out of danger, and that no serious apprehensions need be entertained with regard to the issue. But still this offence cannot be lightly passed over; and the tribunal must think of some suitable punishment for the misdeed."

"I humbly express my gratitude to your Excellency," said Tunar "for the patience with which my case has been investigated—for the elucidation of my innocence in respect to the assassination of my master—and for the pardon which has been pronounced in reference to my offence against the Lady Leila. May I hope that your Excellency will now be inclined to deal mercifully with me in regard to the treatment which the Russian soldier received at my hands when I was escaping from the gaol where on an unjust charge I was confined. I will add yet one word. Brought up in the Christian tenets, I belong to the Armenian Church; but I last night vowed that if I were spared the dire self-reproach which must inevitably have ensued had that unfortunate soldier perished in consequence of the treatment received at my hands, I would enter the pale of the Russo Greek Church at the earliest opportunity."

Tunar was an accomplished hypocrite; and he spoke with an air of the utmost humility, and with every appearance of an equal degree of sincerity. He was profoundly artful. He knew how

anxious the Russian authorities were to procure proselytes for their own church amongst the inhabitants of the Caucasian regions, so that by the formation of religious ties binding those provinces to the Russian Empire, there might be all the less chance of rebellion against Russian domination. Hence he was perfectly aware that a proposal which in reality cost him not the faintest scruple of conscience, would be most welcome to the Judge, and would materially mitigate, if not altogether ward off, whatsoever punishment that functionary thought of pronouncing for the offence relative to the Russian corporal.

"It pleases me well," said his Excellency, "to behold that your mind is so loyally favoured towards the Orthodox Church of which my august master his Imperial Majesty of Russia is the head. Enter, young man, within the pale of that church—receive the benediction of our venerable priests—and you shall be pardoned altogether!"

Tunar sank upon his knees that he might appear to express his sense of this leniency with all the most grateful fervour; and the Judge ordered his chains to be cast off. His Excellency then desired the attendance of all the witnesses, that he might make them acquainted with the several judgments he had pronounced. The escort of soliders entered the hall of the tribunal, to strike off Tunar's chains, and to hold him in custody until he should have been baptised according to the rites of the Russo-Greek Church. Aladyn and Leila, accompanied by Klodissa, and

attended by their respective retainers, were conducted into the court; and Tunar still deeming it politic to maintain the humblest demeanour, bent down his eyes and hung his head as if in shame and confusion when he beheld the Princess Leila: but having caught a glimpse of Klodissa, he wondered who the swarthy female could be, and whether by any possibility she were the closely veiled visitress whom he had seen a few hours back within the walls of his prison.

The clerk of the court at once proceeded to read the sentences which had been pronounced; and the Judge, addressing himself to Leila and Klodissa, said in the most courteous manner, "Inasmuch as it is through your means—or at least chiefly so—that the innocence of this youth in respect to the foul crime of assassination has been made manifest, I hope that it will not be deemed too great a tax upon your goodness if I request that you will attend at the ceremony of his reception into the bosom of the Orthodox Church. For obvious reasons I do not proffer the same demand to his Excellency Aladyn Bey——"

At this moment the Judge stopped short: for our young hero stood forward, evidently for the purpose of addressing some observations to the tribunal.

"May it please your Excellency," said Aladyn, "I also will be present at that ceremony—not merely as a witness, however, but as one who will partake of the same rite. For some little time past I have been in my soul a convert to the Christian faith—that faith in which I was born! It is now too long a

tale to tell how it happened that I was reared by Moslems and in the Moslem creed: but so it was—and now will I return openly and avowedly to the religion of my forefathers!”

The Judge—who, as well as several other persons present, was at first astonished at Aladyn’s address—proclaimed his admiration and delight at the course which our youthful hero was about to adopt; and he issued instructions that the religious ceremonies should forthwith take place. Immediately adjoining the tribunal of justice was a chapel belonging to the Russo-Greek Church; and thither all who were present in the court proceeded. In pursuance of a message previously sent by the Judge, two priests were in attendance at the altar; and to those reverend fathers the double nature of the ceremony which was to take place was quickly explained.

The senior priest—a venerable man with a long flowing beard—directed Aladyn to retire into a little inner chapel to commune with himself for a brief space until the holy rites of Christian baptism should be administered. He obeyed; and Tunar was desired to kneel in front of the altar. Leila and Klodissa, attended by Zaida and Emina, stood at a short distance: a little farther off the Judge, the lawyer, and the officials of the court stationed themselves: the soldiers who had escorted Tunar to the chapel remained near the door—outside the threshold of which Ibrahim and Hafiz had halted. These two Osmanlis were so devotedly attached to their young master that, notwithstanding the prejudices of their own faith, they

had not ventured upon a single syllable of remonstrance against the intention which he had enunciated: they were moreover acquainted with the secret of his birth—and they were sufficiently enlightened to look upon it as only natural that he should return to the faith of his forefathers. Thus, though from motives of respect they had accompanied him to the very door of the church, yet here they halted—for it was contrary to the tenets of their creed for them to enter a place of Christian worship. We may add that it was not merely in deference to the wish of the courteous and merciful Judge that the Princess Leila had at once consented to be present at the ceremony which regarded Tunar; but our amiable heroine was likewise disposed to manifest towards the youth this proof of her forgiveness for his past misconduct, in the true Christian hope that his bitter experience of the paths of evil would teach him to become a reformed and altered character for the future.

Still affecting the deepest humility, Tunar knelt before the altar; the ceremony of baptism took place according to the rites of the Russo-Greek Church.

When that ceremony was completed, Tunar retired to the back part of the church; and Aladyn was then summoned from the little chapel to which he had temporarily retired.

It was to the Russo-Greek Church that Leila herself belonged; and it was therefore to this Church that our young hero had determined upon signifying his adhesion.

He knelt before the altar; and the chief priest, after having for

some time prayed devoutly, received the chalice from the hands of his assistant. He then inquired in a loud voice, "In what name wilt thou be baptised?"

The lips of Aladyn firmly but reverently enunciated the name of DANIAL.

The holy water was sprinkled upon him; and in a few moments he rose from the front of the altar a member of the Christian Church—to bear the name of Aladyn no longer, but to be known by that of Danial. X

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COUSINS.—KLODISSA.

IT WAS with emotions of a soft and holy joy that Leila congratulated her cousin upon the ceremony which had just taken place.

Others who were present likewise proffered their congratulations; and the party was about to move forth from the church to return to their respective homes, when Prince Danial caught sight of Tunar at the extremity of the sacred edifice. Intimating to Leila and Klodissa that he would almost immediately overtake them, he accosted the youth.

Tunar, still wearing an aspect of the utmost humility, rose from his seat as Danial approached; and the youth said, "Receive for yourself as well as on behalf of all others who have succoured me in my recent adversities the expression of my sincerest thanks!"

"If your words be truly significant of your feelings," replied Prince Danial, "I am rejoiced—because they are indicative of con-

trition and remorse for your past misdeeds. To the Princess Leila especially are you most deeply indebted for her merciful kindness after all the wrongs you perpetrated towards her. This is a day of forgiveness; and if I have now accosted you, it is with a friendly intention. You go forth in freedom upon the great world again; and if you adopt a right path, you have many qualities that may enable you to carve out a fine career for yourself. But it were wrong to do things by halves towards you. You have been acquitted of a terrible imputation—you have been forgiven the misdeeds which you actually committed: but on the other hand you have to begin life anew. Without resources, as you must necessarily be, you may yield to fresh temptations—you may re-enter upon the paths of error. It is against this calamity that I am now anxious to guard. Here is a purse sufficiently stored with gold to enable you to find the means of entering upon some honourable pursuit."

With these words Prince Danial placed his purse in Tunar's hands; and then he hastily turned away to avoid the expression of the youth's gratitude.

In the evening of that same day, Prince Danial and the Princess Leila held a consultation in reference to the proceedings which they should next adopt.

"The proclamation of my rank as a Prince of the sovereign family of Mingrelia," said Danial, "must necessarily be deferred until we reach Kutais. But even *then* and *there*, what substantial proofs can I advance of the validity of my claims?"

"Was not I a witness of the lamented Mansour's declarations?" inquired Leila; "and will not the people of Mingrelia attach implicit faith to whatsoever statement emanates from my lips?"

"True, dearest cousin!" answered Danial; "but unfortunately the iron hand of Russia is upon the Mingrelian province; and the Muscovite authorities must be satisfied as well as the Mingrelian people that I am veritably that which I claim to be. It is true," continued Danial with a profound sigh, "that the Russian hold upon Mingrelia is now so strong that the Muscovites have no need to fair the influence of the name of *Danial* as they did upwards of twenty years ago, when Kutais was captured, my father fled, and our grandsire being deposed, fled likewise! Nevertheless the Russians will be jealous of the sudden appearance of a male descendant of that Royal line; and I fear, my sweet Leila, that my claims to recognition as such will be discarded by them, unless supported by the strongest corroborations. I have an idea——"

"Name it!" cried Leila; "for it would indeed rejoice me that your claim should be put forward in a manner that may set every doubt and caval at rest."

"You know, my beloved Leila," continued Danial, "how manifold and how deep are the debts of gratitude that I owe to Mahommed Pasha, my adopted uncle, the Governor of Kars. It were not well on my part to proceed into my native province, Mingrelia, there to settle for the remainder of my life, without previously paying a farewell visit to him who for

more than twenty years has been a father to me. Besides, the fullest explanation of all the marvellous things which have occurred since I quitted Kars, is due to Mahommed Pasha:—and now that I have accepted the Christian tenets, I would not have him think that I had lightly abandoned the Moslem faith in which he reared me. Feeling therefore the necessity of repairing to Kars, may I not render that visit serviceable to my ulterior views? From Mahommed Pasha can I obtain certificates of that same evidence which some time back convinced Mansour that I was indeed the descendant of the Royal line of Mingrelia. Then, armed with these proofs to support my pretensions, I may all the more confidently proclaim them on arriving at Kutais, the capital of our native province!"

The Princess Leila assented to the propriety of the course thus suggested, not only because she felt that it was indeed the performance of a sacred duty which Danial owed to the excellent Pasha of Kars—but likewise because it would serve her cousin's aims in respect to the establishment of his position as a Mingrelian Prince.

"I dare not ask you to accompany me, dearest Leila," continued Danial, "inasmuch as the same reasons which prevented us from taking Kars in our way when recently escaping from the Ottoman dominions, still exist as a barrier opposing your visit to that city. Yet, on the other hand, I cannot endure the thought that you will journey alone to Kutais—while perhaps you are averse to a further sojourn in Georgia——"

"No," said Leila, with modestly downcast eyes, "I will not return to my native city until accompanied by you! I will remain in Georgia during your visit to Kars. I know full well that under existing circumstances it were indiscreet for me to continue any longer to avail myself of the hospitality of this mansion which now belongs to strangers: but there is a calm and peaceful asylum that I may obtain while you are away, and where I am confident that I shall be surrounded with all the kindness of a Georgian welcome. I allude to the abode of the Georgian widow!"

"Be it so!" exclaimed Danial, well pleased with the idea. "And I shall have the satisfaction of escorting you thither! As for the grand secret of the terrestrial paradise cradled amidst the wilds of the Caucasus, I fear that this has perished for ever: for amongst Mansour's papers no document has been found to afford a clue to the position of that lovely vale."

Here Danial suddenly stopped short; for the door had opened—and Klodissa was at the moment entering the room in which this colloquy had taken place. To the swarthy female Danial and Leila expressed their intention to leave Tiflis on the following day: they inquired what her views and plans might be; and declared their readiness to forward them in any manner that lay in their power. Klodissa proclaimed her gratitude for the kind interest thus demonstrated towards her—but she assured the two cousins that there was nothing in which they could assist her. She intimated her intention

of remaining for the present at Tiflis,—adding that sometime thereafter she hoped to be enabled to visit Kutais, when she should pay her respects to those whose welfare would ever be an object of concern with herself. The Princess Leila assured her swarthy friend that she should be only too delighted to have an opportunity of welcoming her to the hospilities of her palace at Kutais.

On the following day Danial and Leila took a kind and affectionate leave of Klodissa,—upon whom our fair heroine would have heaped the costliest gifts: but, in imitation of Thekla's example at Constantinople, the swarthy female would consent to receive nothing but some article of comparatively trifling value, to be retained as a memento of the donor. The domestics belonging to the establishment of the deceased Mansour received notable proofs of the liberality of the Prince and Princess; and the Journey was commenced.

Danial and Leila—attended by Ibrahim and Hafiz, Zaida and Emina—set out from Tiflis; and in the evening the house of the Georgian widow was reached, Leila, hastily alighting from her steed, was the first to enter the humble but hospitable homestead,—where she was received with the most cordial welcome on the part of the widow and her two beautiful daughters, the latter having just returned from the harvest-fields. Danial was on the point of following his cousin into the farm-house, when his ear suddenly caught the sounds of an advancing troop of horsemen coming along the road from a southerly direction. In a few moments the richly laced

coats, the red caps and the flowing purple tassels of some half-dozen Turkish cavaliers met the view; and with a cry of mingled joy and astonishment, Prince Danial exclaimed, "'Tis my adopted uncle—my generous friend, the Pasha of Kars!"

And it was so. But here we must leave those two parties that were about to meet at the house of the Georgian widow; and we must bring back the reader's attention to Tiflis.

It will be recollected that on the preceding evening, Klodissa had entered the room where the two cousins were conversing, at the very moment when Prince Danial was alluding to the terrestrial paradise cradled amidst the mountains of the Caucasus; and he was likewise expressing his mournful regret that no document containing any satisfactory particulars with regard to the position of the valley of Gulistan had been discovered amongst the papers of the murdered Mansour. The door of that room opened so noiselessly that the two cousins were not immediately aware of Klodissa's presence; and thus she caught every syllable that was said in respect to the terrestrial paradise in the Caucasus. On the following day, when Danial and Leila with their respective dependants took their departure from the mansion, Klodissa said to the matron-housekeeper, "I fear that I must now also bid you farewell!"

"For this there is no need," responded the matron, "if it suit your convenience to sojourn yet a little while within these walls: for after the signal services you have rendered to the amiable Lady

Leila—whom we all so much love—it will please me to be enabled to show you any civility or attention. I am for the present mistress here, and have the power to proffer you the continued hospitality of this mansion."

"Yes,—it will suit me," replied Klodissa, "to sojourn yet a few days beneath this roof:"—and she expressed her warmest gratitude for the kindness shown her by the matron-housekeeper.

"Regard the house as your home," said that worthy woman, "so long as I may have the power to give you this welcome."

"It is a spacious habitation, and a splendid one," said Klodissa: "pity were it if it should pass into the hands of strangers who will be less generous with their hospitalities than, according to all accounts, was your deceased master the lamented Mansour! I have as yet seen but few of the apartments—they are handsome and elegant in their appointments—and if they may be taken as a specimen of all the rest, it is indeed a palatial dwelling."

"You have my free permission," replied the matron, "to roam at pleasure throughout the house—to visit all the apartments—to inspect the furniture, the valuables, and the curiosities which they contain—in short, I repeat, regard it as your home."

Klodissa again expressed her gratitude for the kindness that was shown her; and she speedily began to avail herself of the permission she had received. Throughout the rest of that day she roamed from room to room, from chamber to chamber; and being completely alone in this inspection of the

premises, she was free to conduct it according to her own will and inclination. She did not merely recreate her vision by the contemplation of handsome furniture, costly hangings, and multifarious curiosities collected from all parts of the world; but she likewise peered into every nook and corner—penetrated into every place where foot might be set—examined the floors and the walls, with the air of a person seeking for some lost object, or else for the solution of some mystery to which a certain clue had been already acquired. And it was not only throughout the period of daylight that this investigation was pursued—but when all the domestics of the household had retired to rest, Klodissa still continued her scrutinizing search, though under circumstances of the utmost caution, so as to avoid the chance of disturbing any of the other inmates of the dwelling. But her search appeared to be all in vain, minute and scrutinizing though it were. Fruitlessly did she lift up carpets to examine the floors beneath, as if in the expectation of discerning some place contrived for the secret concealment of whatsoever it were that she was thus hunting after: fruitlessly too did she study the arrangement of the panelling on the walls—tap against it—push each separate panel as if with the idea that it might slide in its setting;—and fruitlessly did she scrutinize the construction of various pieces of furniture as though she thought that some secret portion of the woodwork might suddenly fly open. When the beams of morning stole through the casements, she was still at her work:

but she was soon compelled to abandon it and retire to her own chamber, for fear lest she should be surprised by any early riser in the midst of her occupation.

Having slept for a few hours Klodissa rose; and when she had partaken of the morning meal, she sallied forth into the city of Tiflis. There she visited several shops where keys were sold; and pretending to have at her residence a peculiar lock the proper key for which she had accidentally lost, she purchased a miscellaneous assortment of these little instruments. She was however careful not to buy too many at one place, for fear lest suspicion should be excited; and thus her wanderings for this purpose occupied several hours. With a mass of Keys of all sizes and descriptions concealed about her person, she returned to the habitation of the deceased merchant; and when night came and the domestics had once more retired to rest, the swarthy female recommenced her roamings through the house.

Still she seemed to have in view some special object of search: but her investigation was conducted in a manner different from that of the preceding night. Her keys were now brought into requisition. Wheresoever there was a table that contained a drawer, or a bureau that opened—wheresoever in the pieces of furniture, in the walls, or in the flooring there appeared a hole that could by any possibility have a lock concealed within—Klodissa tried her keys,—but all to no effect. It is true that she opened many a drawer, many a cupboard, many a bureau; and though they were all stored with curiosities or with

objects of value, yet not one single article of their contents did she self-appropriate. Whatever were her object, it assuredly was not that of the base larcenist, the mean pilferer, or the midnight thief. Gems and jewels greeted her eyes; but she touched them not. The house was to be disposed of with all its valuable contents,—a custom that is common enough in the Caucasian regions as well as in the Ottoman Empire; and thus these precious objects had been left in their depositories, all to be subjected to the process of a general appraisalment whensoever a bidder might come forward. But Klodissa flung an indifferent and sometimes a disdainful look upon the costly articles to the view of which her purchased keys opened the way; and when the light of morning again dawned in through the casements, she retreated to her chamber after a night of unsuccessful and resultless search.

Having again slept several hours Klodissa partook of the refreshments that were served up to her; and she was descending from her apartment to walk in the garden, when in a vestibule through which she had to pass, she found the matron in conversation with a tall youth whose skin was as sable and glossy as that of an Ethiopian. He was apparelled in a light dress; it was the garb of a common labourer; and it threw out the blackness of his skin into the strongest relief.

"Well, then," the matron was saying at the moment Klodissa made her appearance, "the references are respectable enough; and if you call again in the evening, I will let you know the result."

The sable youth bowed in the most respectful manner, and instantaneously quitted the vestibule, making his way into the street.

"Is that a new domestic whom you purpose to add to the establishment?" inquired Klodissa, after she had exchanged the usual salutations of the day with the matron.

"Yes," replied the latter: "it is an indispensable addition. Ever since the mansion fell into the hands of my deceased master's eldest son, a watchman has been employed to exercise his vigilance in the garden during the night: for the place is full of valuables of all sorts—and after the stealthy way in which the villains made their entry to carry off the Lady Leila, it has been considered consistent with prudence that such a watch should be maintained."

"Assuredly so," answered Klodissa; "nothing can be more wise."

"And I am all the more anxious," continued the matron, "to attend to the instructions which I have received to this effect, inasmuch as having the principal charge of the establishment, I feel all the responsibility of such a position."

"Unquestionably so," rejoined Klodissa, who appeared to be speaking in a listless conversational way.

"Hitherto," continued the matron, who was fond of a little gossip, no matter how trivial the subject, "the old gardener has performed the duty of watchman; but I find that if he sits up all night he does no work during the day—and the garden cannot be suffered to go to rack and ruin. Besides, he is well-

stricken in years, as you may have doubtless observed—and therefore, not fit for the double post. He complained to me yesterday of his inability to fulfil the twofold duties; and I accordingly notified to some of the tradesmen that if they knew of a trustworthy person to take the place of watchman, they might send such an individual hither. The result is the application of the young African whom you have just seen. He tells me he comes from beyond the cataracts of the Nile—that he has sojourned some few years in Asia-Minor—and that he has now found his way into Georgia.”

“And you have engaged with him?” asked Klodissa.

“Not exactly,” responded the matron. “It is a situation of confidence, you know—and I purpose to make inquiries of the tradesman who has recommended him. That was the reason you heard me tell him to return in the evening. It will then be plenty of time for me to decide, inasmuch as the gardener is all day along in the grounds, and thus no evil-disposed person can enter unobserved while it is light. If this African’s references are satisfactory, he can enter upon his duties at sunset.”

“True,” said Klodissa. “I see that you manage with the utmost caution and carefulness.”

Here the conversation ended; and Klodissa divided her time throughout the day between rambling in the garden and reading in her own chamber; for she did not think fit to renew her wanderings through the mansion during the day, for fear lest such conduct should engender some suspicion.

As the hour of sunset approach-

ed Klodissa loitered in the vestibule to which we have before alluded; and with a book in her hand, she sat near an open window, through which the refreshing breeze was wafted—so that it seemed as if she had sought a cool retreat where she might enjoy a view of the garden and the fragrance of the flowers. The matron joined her there; and they were conversing together, when the sable candidate for the watchman’s place reappeared to learn the housekeeper’s decision. Klodissa, bending over her book, appeared to be absorbed in its contents, and to take not the slightest notice of what now passed betwixt the matron and the young man. The housekeeper informed him that his references were satisfactory; she named the wages that he would receive, and explained his duties. The bargain was therefore struck; and the matron said, “You may commence your services at once; for this is the hour when the old gardener will leave off work. Remember, you are to walk about the grounds all nights—you are to keep a special watch on the back gate, as well as upon the doors that open into the building. See! here are firearms—and with these must you be provided.”

The sable youth bowed, and took the pair of pistols which the matron indicated. In the same cupboard which contained them, there was the suitable ammunition; he loaded the weapons and secured them about his person. He then issued forth into the garden; and the matron was almost immediately summoned away to superintend some domestic duty in another part of the house.

Klodissa glided from the vesti-

bule; and she passed out into the grounds. The sun was just setting; she could discern the white garments of the new functionary at the farther extremity. He was bidding the old gardener "good evening" at the back gate. Klodissa then heard the gate close and the key turn in the lock. She stole amidst a dense group of high shrubs; and there she remained motionless in her concealment.

In a few minutes she beheld the new watchman pass along the avenue in the immediate vicinage of which she was hidden; and she followed him keenly with her eyes. On gaining the extremity of the avenue—the very spot where the unfortunate Mansour had met his death—the sable youth stopped short and looked carefully all around. Apparently satisfied that the coast was completely clear, he continued his way to a neighbouring tool-house; and thence he took forth some implement. He began to retrace his steps: he paused again—looked searchingly around—and then came on. Nearer and nearer to Klodissa did he thus advance,—until at length he halted at a distance of about half-a-dozen yards from the spot where ~~she was~~ concealed. Her hand was now slowly and noiselessly thrust beneath the folds of her upper garment: and she drew forth a dagger from its sheath.

Again the sable youth had halted; to and fro in the avenue his looks were flung: and once more apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, he plunged amidst the trees and shrubs in the close vicinage of Klodissa's hiding-place. Like a tigress in her lair preparing to spring upon some unsuspecting

intruder, was the swarthy female, as she all the more tightly clutched the sharp dagger!

But the sable youth penetrated not entirely into the depth of the verdant thicket: he halted at a particular spot—and he began to dig out the ground in that place; for it was a spade which he had brought with him from the tool-house. Then noiselessly and insidiously as a snake glides through the grass, did Klodissa steal by degrees nearer and nearer amidst the shrubs,—her hand still clutching the naked dagger.

Not long was the sable youth in digging up the ground; for what he evidently sought was discovered in the space of a few minutes. A low and half-stifled murmur of joy escaped his lips as he stooped down to take up something from the hole which he had dug; and at that instant Klodissa flew at him as if it were the tigress springing from its lair, or the reptile darting from the herbage. Indeed it was with lightning swiftness.

"Not a syllable, or you die!" she said in a low quick voice, but with accents of the fiercest determination: and as one hand clutched him forcibly, the other upheld the poniard in readiness to strike.

Speechless with terror, the sable youth dropped the spade; and forgetting his pistols in the bewilderment of his consternation, he sank upon his knees.

"Silence!" muttered Klodissa, as she menacingly brandished the dagger. "I know you! You are Tunar!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECRET DOCUMENTS.

SO COMPLETELY paralyzed with terror was the coward

soul of Tunar, that he remained upon his knees, gazing up in consternation and dismay at Klodissa, whose handsome dusky countenance expressed the fiercest, sternest resoluteness. When a woman acquires such an influence over a man, it is no ordinary power that she wields: it is one which subdues even the idea of making a desperate effort for self-deliverance. Were it a man by whom Tunar had been thus suddenly accosted, he would doubtless have displayed that energy—the energy of desperation itself, which he had shown on the occasion of his escape from the fortalice. But it was indeed no wonder that Klodissa should now exercise this power over him. It was she who had presented herself as his saviour when he was in captivity: she had displayed a knowledge of many things which made him marvel how they could have become revealed to her:—and thus the very mystery which hung around her had already imbued Tunar's mind with a certain superstitious awe in respect to the swarthy female. He had not expected to find her at the deceased merchant's house when he applied for the situation of watchman; but on beholding her in the vestibule, he flattered himself that she took so little notice of him that she could not possibly suspect who was really concealed beneath the disguise which he had assumed. And this impression was all the stronger on his mind from the fact that the matron housekeeper, who had known him for so many years, had failed to penetrate through that disguise: while the other domestics of the household who might have

happened to see him in his present condition—especially the gardener—had been equally remote from entertaining the idea that it was Tunar whom they encountered. But while several individuals who for various lengthy periods had known him well, failed to penetrate through his disguise,—here was a female who (as he thought to himself) had never seen him more than two or three times, recognising him at once—darting her keen regards as it were though the dye that stained his complexion and his hair—through the white dress likewise, that was so different from any costume he had ever worn before! Thus it seemed to Tunar as if Klodissa were a being gifted with some superior powers that bordered upon the preternatural: while the terrible energy which she displayed—the boldness of the attack—the suddenness with which it was made—and the menacing intrepidity with which the poniard was grasped by her hand,—all these circumstances combined to strike terror into the guilty soul of the youth.

"You are Tunar!" she had said, and there he knelt, gazing up at her in consternation and dismay.

His tongue was paralyzed, as were his limbs: and while Klodissa held the dagger threateningly with one hand, with the other she suddenly tore open the upper part of his vesture.

"Move not a hair's breadth!" she said, in that low concentrated voice which, combined with the rapidity of its accents, was so terribly corroborative of the boldness and intrepidity displayed by her proceedings; "or I strike with my poniard! There is sudden

death in its point—the slightest scratch of the skin is fatal—for the blade is poisoned!”

Tunar shuddered to the utmost confines of his entire being; and deeper if possible, grew the dismay and horror that filled his soul.

Forth from within the folds of his outer vesture did Klodissa snatch one of the pistols with which the youth was armed: and she secured it about her own person. Then, quick as lightning, she took forth the second pistol; and this she disposed of in the same way as the former. It was all the work of a few moments: and Tunar was now more completely at her mercy than even he was at first—for in addition to the palsying influence of his terror, he found himself utterly defenceless.

The hole which he had dug was about two feet deep; and a glance which Klodissa's luminous black eyes had flung into the opening showed her that the object which Tunar had been about to take forth was lying at the bottom. It was a roll of paper tied round with a string; and Klodissa's looks had flashed with joyous triumph.

“Give me those papers!” she said, in a quick peremptory tone, when she had achieved the rapid work of disarming the coward youth.

He was already on his knees:—not a single instant did he hesitate to obey; but stooping down, he picked up the roll of documents from the bottom of the pit. He handed them to Klodissa; and as she took them, Tunar felt as if his very life were swiftly ebbing out of him—as if all the hopes which but a few minutes before her sudden appearance he had been embody-

ing in the most brilliant substantial shapes, were passing away from him like the phantoms of a dream.

“’Tis well!” said Klodissa securing the documents about her person, as she had done with respect to the firearms; and the sun at noonday never shone with brighter beams than the rays of ecstasy and triumph which her lustrous orbs flashed forth. “Rise—and obey me!”

Tunar rose from his suppliant posture; and Klodissa said in the same peremptory tone as before, “Fill up that hole!”

He at once addressed himself to the task; and though his frame was quivering with all the varied emotions which were wildly agitating within his heart, yet there was a nervous alacrity in his proceedings. The hole was soon filled up; and he again stood awaiting the orders of his imperious taskmistress.

“Tunar,” she said, “you seem determined never to profit by the experiences of the past. Scarcely are you redeemed from the jaws of death—scarcely are you in a wondrous manner escaped from the penalties of your numerous crimes—than you are perpetrating fresh misdeeds and incurring fresh risks of punishment. Insensate that you are! If I were but to raise an alarm you would be captured—you would be plunged anew into the dungeons of yon frowning fortalice—you would again be led into the presence of the Judge! Then it would be as the purloiner of the secret papers belonging to your deceased master that you would tremble before the tribunal—and you would be further accused of assuming this disguise for all the worst of purposes when

insinuating yourself again within the walls of this dwelling ! And then all your past offences for which you have been pardoned, would weigh with the Judge in the sentence to be pronounced ; and imprisonment in the fortalice for the remainder of your days would inevitably be your doom."

"Spare me lady—spare me !" murmured Tunar, clasping his hands in anguish : "spare me, I beseech you !—and I will leave Tiflis for ever !"

"Answer me !" said Klodissa ; "how came these papers in your possession ? But beware how you deceive me !—for you see that no act nor deed of yours can escape my penetrating vigilance ! Perhaps I know more than you think ?—and perhaps I am only putting this question in order to prove you ?"

"Judge then of my sincerity !" answered Tunar. "On the memorable night when Leila was carried off, I found my murdered master lying yonder, weltering in his blood. I took the keys from about his person : I ascended to his apartment—I possessed myself of these papers—I had but a moment to glance at the few opening words to convince myself that they were the documents which I yearned to possess—I hastened down again into the garden—and I buried them here. Scarcely was my task accomplished, when I was arrested."

There was a sufficiency of moonlight straggling through the trees to enable Klodissa to watch Tunar's countenance with the keenest earnestness as he thus spoke ; and despite the sable dye which disguised that countenance, she could have at once told by its

expression if in a single tittle he were speaking falsely. But she saw he was giving utterance to the truth ; and well was it for him that he did so ! Klodissa felt convinced that he had *not* perused the papers before he consigned them to the hiding-place whence they were just disinterred, and that he was consequently still ignorant of the clue to the terrestrial paradise cradled amidst the Caucasian mountains. If she had thought otherwise she would have at once, pitilessly and remorselessly, plunged her dagger into Tunar's breast, so that the secret as far as *he* was concerned might have perished with him. But she saw that this extreme measure was unnecessary, and that it would be a needless crime for her to imbrue her hands with the blood of the wretched youth.

"Yes—you have spoken with sincerity," she said, fixing her dark eyes still upon him so as to acquire the completest assurance that she was not deceived ; "and I will deal mercifully with you on condition that you forthwith obey my mandates."

"Oh, rest assured that I will !" exclaimed Tunar—and there was even gratitude in his tone.

"Listen to me," continued Klodissa. "You will at once take a horse from the stable—and you will without delay speed far off from Tiflis."

"But the deed will brand me as a mean, vile robber ?" said Tunar in consternation.

Indescribable was the smile of mingled scorn and contempt which curled Klodissa's lips as Tunar thus spoke.

"Robber !" she said, in accents

which corresponded with the withering significance of that smile; "and are you not already a robber—the pilferer of your deceased master's papers? Oh! as well might the guileful serpent claim a repute for sincerity as you are justified in assuming this mockery of a fastidious honour! Yes—you will steal a steed from yon stable; and to-morrow it will be said that the African watchman has fled upon an animal that is not his own! This is what I mean to take place, and what I desire. With a charge of theft hanging over your head, you will never again dare revisit Tiflis in that disguise; and if you have the hardihood to return to this city, with your proper personal appearance as Tunar, I shall at once proclaim that Tunar and the African watchman who self-appropriated the steed from the stable are one and the same person! Remain for ever absent—and no one need know that the seeming African was really Tunar. Thus," added Klodissa, with another scornful smile, "since you are so fastidious in respect to your honour, it may be spared—and the name of Tunar need not be more deeply branded than it already is."

"Lady, I submit," said the youth, who saw by her tone, look, and manner that she was resolved to enforce her will in all respects.

"Precede me, she said: "lead the way to the stable—and remember that I hold the poisoned dagger in my hand! Remember likewise that if you attempt to flee, a bullet discharged from one of the very pistols are now entrusted to yourself will speedily stop your flight."

These fearful menaces so strongly renewed for a moment the terror with which the dusky-complexioned lady had already inspired Tunar, that his legs appeared to bend under him; and it was only by a suddenly exerted effort that he was enabled to continue his way. The stables were reached: the door was fastened merely with a latch; and when it was opened wide, the moonlight revealed the interior with a sufficient degree of plainness. There were some half-dozen horses in the stable; and Klodissa, pointing to the one which stood in a stall nearest to the door, said, "Take this."

"It was the favourite steed of my deceased master," replied Tunar; "and for fourteen years it had carried him. There are others here, younger and more active; and if it be your will that I leave Georgian territory with speed and dispatch, suffer me to select another."

"No—take that one!" answered Klodissa, imperiously. "Being the oldest, it is the least valuable; and as I am in some sense an accomplice in the theft, it were as well to diminish the magnitude of the misdeed as much as possible."

Tunar uttered not another syllable of remonstrance: but he proceeded to saddle and bridle the horse which had belonged to his deceased master. At a very short distance from the stable door there was a grass-plot,—the interval being paved with stones. There was the danger of the trampling of the horse's feet upon those stones being heard in the dwelling; and Klodissa said, "Scatter a quantity of hay between the door and the grass-plot."

selves will constitute a perfect heaven of happiness!"

But if we were to penetrate a little more deeply into Klodissa's mind, we should discover that there was a motive somewhat more selfish and egotistical than she would willingly admit to herself, in resolve to make Leila and Danial the sharers in her secret and in her happiness. The truth is that this very happiness itself was rendering her in one sense a coward. She feared lest it should be snatched away from her—lest she might lose it in the attempt to realize it. She read in the deceased merchant's written description enough to convince her that the route through the Caucasus was attended with perils and dangers of no ordinary description; and she was aware that those wilds were frequently infested by banditi. What therefore if she were to dare the journey above? Sudden death, either from a fall into an abyss or from the assassin hand of a ruthless marauder, might cut short her career ere the goal should be reached—that goal which consisted of the loveliest flowers and the costliest gems, delicious fruits and piles of precious metal—an ever-genial atmosphere, and an elysium into which the bleak tempests of the world could not come! Oh, no—Klodissa must not incur the slightest risk of being cut off before that goal was reached! She must have companionship; and who better calculated to guide her amidst difficult mountain passes, or defend her from the attacks of wandering ruffians than the intelligent, the interpid, and the chivalrous Danial?

Yes—these considerations floated in Klodissa's mind, though in her

musings she was loth to admit that they had a veritable existence there. For let it be well understood that her motives were far from being altogether thus selfish. In the current of her thoughts, as we have above recorded them, everything she said unto herself was strictly correct. She really loved Leila—she admired Danial—she deemed it an act of duty and justice to make them the sharers in the secret originally intended by the deceased merchant for themselves; yet she mentally suppressed as far as she was able the self-acknowledgment that there was any egotistical motive to be super-added to all the others.

Brief was the rest which Klodissa took that night; for her heart was too full of happiness to permit her to seek her couch until a late hour, or to close her eyes in slumber very soon when she did at length court it. Yet when she rose in the morning she was as refreshed as if she had slept throughout the live long night: for the happiness of her mind was in itself vigour for the frame likewise. She had not long quitted her couch when the matron came to her chamber, with the tale that the African watchman was a villain, who had fled during the night with the favourite steed of the deceased Mansour; and Klodissa listened to the recital with every appearance of astonishment and indignation.

Having partaken of the morning repast, Klodissa signified to the matron that the business which had detained her at Tiflis was completed; and having warmly expressed her gratitude for the kind hospitality she had received—as well as having bestowed sub-

antial proofs of that thankfulness upon the worthy dame and the other domestics—Klodissa mounted her horse and took her departure.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FARM-HOUSE.

KLODISSA'S destination was the house of the Georgian widow, where she knew that the Princess Leila purposed to sojourn during her cousin Danial's visit to Kars. The handsome dusky-complexioned female arrived in the evening at the hospitable homestead, where to her surprise she found Ibrahim and Hafiz smoking their chibouques in front of the dwelling. She, however, soon learnt what had occurred; and entering—the house, she was speedily clasped in the arms of Leila. Prince Danial—who was likewise there—greeted her with cordiality; and then they were both anxious to learn to what circumstance they might attribute her sudden and unexpected appearance there.

But Klodissa intimated that all explanations must be deferred; for the Georgian widow and her two daughters were present in the apartment. She, however, relieved the minds of the two cousins from all anxiety, if not from all suspense, by assuring them that her visit was the harbinger of no evil. Klodissa was now presented to the mistress of the homestead and her two daughters, by whom she was cordially welcomed; for the widow having heard the history of Leila's adventures at Constantinople, knew full well what part Klodissa had played in them; and she was for more than one reason grateful to the swarthy female. She was

grateful because Klodissa had so signally served our heroine in whom the widow was deeply interested; and she was grateful likewise, because, thanks to the success of that generous intervention on Klodissa's part, the widow had been enabled to obtain intelligence of her lost daughter Ayesha, now called Tarkhana. Thus Klodissa at once found herself received in that circle with the most friendly greeting, as if she had been a missing link the want of which was now fully supplied by her presence.

But if Klodissa did not choose to give immediate explanations of the cause of her visit to the homestead; There was no necessity for Danial to defer a revelation of the motives which detained him there. Our readers will recollect that when Leila and Danial, with their respective attendants, arrived at the farm-house, the approach of Mohammed Pasha, Governor of Kars, was almost immediately despatched. That illustrious personage—having recently received no intelligence from Danial (whom he still called Aladyn), and fearing that some evil might have overtaken the youth of whom he was so fond, resolved to make a journey to Tiflis to inquire after him. He set out accordingly with some half-dozen aides-de-camp and dependants; and having by mischance taken the longer instead of the shorter route, he arrived in that neighbourhood where the farm-house was situated. Fortunate, however, did the seeming mischance prove to be: for there, at that farm-house his Highness the Pasha found the object of his search.

We must here remind our readers that the thread of our story has brought us to the beginning of autumn in the year of 1853—that memorable year in which Russian insolence and encroachment proved the origin of a war. But war was not as yet declared by the Sultan against the Czar. It is true that the Danubian Principalities had been invaded by the Russian armies—true, likewise, that an immense Ottoman force had been marshalled for the defence of the line of the Danube—and true also that the illustrious Omar Pasha had been appointed Serdar and Sipehasalar of the armies of the Sultan. But still the declaration of war was not yet made, though it was seen to be imminent. The Vienna conferences were delaying it with the tedious intricacies of diplomacy, while the Turks and their heroic chief were burning to enter upon that career which was to eventuate in the ignominious expulsion of the Muscovite troops from Wallachia and Moldavia. But still, we repeat, the extreme measure remained as yet untaken—the solemn declaration of hostilities had not gone forth from Constantinople to roll like the reverberating thunder throughout Europe and Asia. Therefore, peace still subsisting—though almost as a fiction, like the lull that precedes the storm, or like the breath held in suspense ere the lips vomit forth the sounds of ire and rage—it was not dangerous for the Pasha of Kars to enter the Georgian territory though it belonged to Russia. It was inconvenient for him to leave the seat of his provincial government at a time when the whole Ottoman empire

was beginning to arm: but the kind-hearted Pasha, leaving his deputy to fulfil all duties requisite at Kars, had come to seek that adopted nephew whom he loved as dearly as if he were his own son.

They met, as we have said, at the farm-house; and most affectionate was that meeting. The Pasha—a fine-looking man, stricken in years, of distinguished and aristocratic appearance—was gifted with a high intelligence: he was of liberal education and courtly manners. He had acquired a great repute as a commander in the field; and his sway as the Beglerbeg, or Governor, of an immense province, was characterized by moderation, justice and the strictest probity. It was no wonder that, even apart from the deep debt of gratitude which our hero owed to the Pasha, this bond of affection should be cemented by admiration for the noble character of that illustrious personage. Thus warm was the meeting; and when Mohammed Pasha was presented to Leila, he was charmed with the amiability, the beauty, the intelligence, and the fascinating manners of the Princess of Mingrelia.

Without the slightest reserve Danial related to his Highness Mohammed all the marvellous adventures which had occurred to himself and Leila; and the Pasha listened with mingled astonishment and interest. He congratulated Danial on the clearing-up of the mystery of his birth—that mystery which had at length received so brilliant an elucidation! He likewise congratulated the two cousins on the discovery of their kinship; and he chided not Danial on account of his abandonment of

the Moslem creed; for, like Ibrahim and Hafiz, the Pasha considered that it was perfectly natural for the youth to return to the religion of his forefathers. But his Highness could not help seeing that if Leila had gained a cousin who would sooner or later become her husband, he himself was destined to lose the society of an adopted nephew whom indeed he had regarded as a son. Yet Mohammed was too intelligent not to discern, and too generous not to acknowledge, that the young Prince Danial was only pursuing the new career in which by the inevitable force of circumstances he was placed. He therefore did not attempt to dissuade him from any of his projects: but on the other hand the kind-hearted Osmanli assured Danial that he should ever be rejoiced to hear of his welfare, and that he was resolved to make him his heir, no matter how rich he might become or how little he might thenceforth need any accession of wealth.

His Highness Mohammed Pasha remained at the farm-house until the ensuing day,—his suite obtaining quarters in a neighbouring village. Previous to taking his departure, the Pasha promised that immediately on his return to Kars he would transmit to Danial the depositions, certificates, and other details of evidence which were requisite to prove the secret of his birth and substantiate his claims to be acknowledged as a Prince of Mingrelia. Affectionate were the embraces exchanged between the worthy Osmanli and the youthful Prince ere the former took his departure; and the Georgian widow received a munificent acknowledg-

ment of the hospitality which she had shown to the Pasha of Kars.

The reader will now comprehend how it came to be determined that Prince Danial should tarry at the homestead until the promised materials of evidence should reach him from Kars; and the above recorded explanations accounted to Klodissa for the circumstance of finding our young hero at a place where she had only expected to meet the Star of Mingrelia. She was however delighted that occurrences had thus turned out, inasmuch as the result would be to abridge the delay which must otherwise have intervened, if Prince Danial had actually gone on to Kars and if his return had still to be awaited.

The Georgian widow soon perceived—or at least surmised, that Klodissa had special motives for visiting her homestead, and that the dusky-complexioned lady was anxious to be left alone with the two cousins. The worthy woman accordingly retired early with her daughters that evening,—leaving Prince Danial, the Princess Leila, and Klodissa in possession of the only sitting-room of which the tenement could boast.

Then Klodissa joyously entered upon her wondrous revelations; and she began by stating that she had discovered certain papers which intimately regarded the two cousins, and which likewise contained the secret relative to the Caucasian paradise. Not a syllable did Klodissa speak in respect to Tunar; she gave her own fictitious version of the finding of the documents, just as it had suited her purpose a few days back to give a fictitious version of all that

had taken place between herself and Kyri Karaman on the bank of the rivulet. She pretended that feeling a plank move strangely beneath her feet in her chamber at the deceased merchant's house, she had been led to examine it—she found that it glided back—and she declared that in a recess beneath she had discovered those documents. She uttered not a word concerning her previous vain and fruitless search: she led the listening cousins to believe that the first scintillation of knowledge which she obtained in respect to the existence of the Caucasian paradise was derived solely and wholly from the contents of those papers.

Infinite was the delight of Danial and Leila when they thus learnt that the stupendous secret was not lost—that it had not perished with the murdered merchant, that it was still preserved to mankind. The possession of the document containing the narrative of all that regarded the young Prince Danial's birth and parentage, was a subject for special self-felicitation—inasmuch as this, together with the evidences to be transmitted from Kars would furnish irrefragable proof of the validity of his pretensions and the justice of his claims. Klodissa produced the two papers; and Leila embraced her fervidly—while Danial wrung her hand with grateful effusion; for they both gave her credit for motives utterly unallowed with selfishness in the course which she had adopted by speeding straightway from Tiflis to the farm-house that she might place the papers in their hands. They both comprehended full well that if she had

chosen she might have kept the clue to the grand secret entirely to herself, and that she might have at once sped off into the bosom of the Caucasus to enter the valley of Gulistan: but, on the contrary she had lost not a moment in speeding to make *them* the sharers in the fruits of the mystery's elucidation!

Klodissa was a Christian; and as the secret of the Vale of Roses was always to be in the keeping of three persons of that persuasion, there appeared not to be the slightest reason for the cousins to dispute the swarthy female's right to be one of the trio. Indeed, from all circumstances it was manifest that she had every right; and moreover the secret itself was now known to her. It was therefore agreed that they should all three set off with the least possible delay on a visit to the terrestrial paradise. Arrangements might be so made that there should be nothing to keep them at the farm-house; and it was consequently settled that they should commence their journey at daybreak. From the depths of the Caucasus Leila and Aladyn could, when they thought fit, repair into Mingrelia: while Klodissa might follow her own inclinations according as they were influenced by the visits to Gulistan.

That evening before retiring to rest, Leila signified to Zaida and Emina that business of an important nature, but of no disagreeable character, would compel her to separate from them on the morrow, and that in due course they would set out on their return to Mingrelia under the escort of Ibrahim and Hafiz. On his side Prince Danial made a similar communication to

his own two faithful dependants, who notwithstanding their young master's change of creed, had resolved to remain in his service. They were directed to wait at the farm-house until the arrival of the expected packet from Kars; and on the receipt thereof they were to enter upon their journey, escorting Zaida and Emina back to the Mingrelian capital.

We must now return to Tunar. It was in the evening, be it remembered, when mounted upon the stolen steed belonging to the deceased merchant, he found himself riding through the streets of Tiflis,—all his grandest hopes blighted and his brilliant visions of happiness and wealth destroyed! His only consolation was that he had again escaped from an imminent peril, and that he possessed a considerable sum in gold, the gift of Prince Danial's bounty towards him.

Tunar saw the absolute necessity of obeying Klodissa's mandates and leaving Tiflis without delay. He first of all returned to his lodgings—which indeed was at the house of the tradesman who had recommended him to the matron, and whom by some specious tale Tunar had won over to his interests. The youth entrusted his steed to the care of a boy for a few minutes, while he hastened to his chamber, washed off the sable dye from his complexion and hair, and resumed his usual apparel. Then having recompensed the tradesman for his civilities, Tunar mounted his horse and took his departure.

He knew not whither to go: he had as yet formed no plan for the future; his mind was too much

unsettled by recent vexations to deliberate calmly upon the subject—and he therefore cared not what direction he took. North, east, south, or west—it was now all the same to Tunar, so long as when the sun dawned it should not find him in Tiflis. He did what many persons have done and would do in a similar case, when listlessly indifferent to the pursuing of any particular route: he left the bridle hanging loose and suffered the horse to take its own path.

Onward the young horseman thus went at a moderate pace: and he remained plunged in a deep reverie until aroused therefrom by finding himself at the north-western gate of Tiflis. There he passed by the Russian sentinels; and still suffering the animal to take its own course, he relapsed into gloomy and moody meditation. The steed went on for some while; and Tunar began gradually to arouse himself from his reverie. The moon was shining clear and bright: the mountain of the Caucasus looked like huge dark clouds piled up in the horizon before him. Thitherward the steed was bearing Tunar; but the youth had no inclination to penetrate amidst those wilds;—the magical inducement which would have led him thither had ere now passed from his hands into those of Klodissa! Much as but a short time back he had longed for the opportunity to penetrate amidst those wilds, he now loathed it—for the motive existed no longer! Accordingly, on reaching the first point whence a bye-path led out from the route he was pursuing, he drew the bridle to turn the horse into that diverging lane. The animal resisted the

impulse and kept on its way. Tunar smote the steed with a whip, which he had taken from the deceased merchant's stable: but the animal only for a moment showed a symptom of restiveness, and persevered in its own course as if with a self-willed obstinacy.

Tunar—thoroughly acquainted with the character of horses, and well aware of the instinct and intelligence which they frequently display—was struck by the conduct of the steed he was bestriding. He knew the horse to be usually docile and quiet as a lamb; and it was for these qualities that the deceased Mansour had so much aluded the animal.

"There is something strange in this," said Tunar to himself. "There may be a lurking danger down that lane into which I sought to turn him—a danger of which I was and still an unconscious? But I have often heard and read that the instinct of the brute is sometimes more valuable than the reason of man!"

Influenced by this idea, Tunar ceased from his endeavour to coerce the horse, and began patting its neck as if indebted to the animal as to a saviour from some peril. The intelligent steed showed symptoms of pleasure and gratification, and went trotting along with every indication of delight at having its own way. But nearer and nearer was Tunar thus taken towards the openings of the defiles and passes of the Caucasus; while stronger and stronger became his aversion to enter midst scenes where a thousand perils might await him. Again therefore after a while he endeavoured to turn the steed into a diverging path,

using gentle means by coaxing and caressing the animal. But no! the horse would still persist in pursuing its own way. Tunar again got angry; and forgetting in the moment of his ire his recent philosophic reasoning on the instincts of the equine race, he renewed the application of the whip. The animal however cared not for it, but still persisted in carrying Tunar along the route which led direct towards the defiles of the Caucasus.

The youth was again smitten with the strangeness of the proceedings. The horse evidently was not frightened to go straight ahead—but it would not turn out of its direct path. Tunar now reflected, too, that the animal had exhibited no indication of fear, but merely of self-will, on both occasions that he had endeavoured to divert its steps into other roads: for, like all dwellers in the Caucasian districts, Tunar was intimately acquainted with every sign of temper feeling, or inclination on the part of horses. Thus there was evidently some mystery which preplexed and bewildered the youth—until gradually a suspicion, at first faint as the feeble glimmering of a light at the remotest distance at which it can be seen, began to steel in unto his mind. For fourteen years that horse had been in Mansour's possession; but Mansour had seldom ridden it on other occasions except when he undertook those mysterious journeys which had for a while bewildered Tunar but which he had at length discovered to be connected with the paradise in the bosom of the Caucasus. What, then, if this steed were pursuing a familiar road?

What if it thus persevered in taking a route that was best known to its instincts? When the reins were thrown upon its neck in the heart of Tiflis, had it not spontaneously proceeded to the north-western gate? and did it not seem to know well the road upon which that gate opened?

As these ideas gradually acquired substance and strength in Tunar's mind, he felt wild hopes arising in his breast,—dreams and visions of things which he had but a little while ago fancied to be for ever lost or beyond his reach;—until at length, as he became convinced that his steed was moving onward with a fixed purpose, as if it were a human being having a specific object in view, Tunar gave vent to a wild cry of delight, exclaiming, "By heaven! the joys and the wealth of Gulistan shall yet be mine!"

And the enthusiastic shout was answered in countless reverberations amidst the defiles of the Caucasus, into which the youth was now being borne by the intelligent animal he bestrode.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE JOURNEY IN THE CAUCASUS.

THOUGH Tiflis may be said to be situated almost on the very confines of the Eastern Caucasus, yet the actual mountains themselves are at some considerable distance. The undulations of the landscape, at first gentle, gradually become more and more marked, making each valley deeper and each hill higher,—as a boat pushing off from the shore encounters ripples that increase into waves, and waves that swell into billows,

the farther and farther it is borne out into the open sea.

Thus Tunar found that the scenery in the midst of which he was travelling grew bolder and bolder, until that which was at first a beautiful landscape began to partake of an air of wildness,—the valleys breaking into ravines—the hills growing rugged—in some places presenting frontages of dark crags, overlooking chasms in the depths of which the waters eddied and gushed along. But still there was a good beaten pathway for the progress of the steed; and the intelligent animal seemed to be as well acquainted with the road it was taking as a man might be with the most familiar street in his native city. Every now and then the horse pricked his ears—looked attentively at some object for a few moments—and then, as if satisfied that it was the proper landmark which had to be studied, the steed pursued its way with a lightness and readiness singularly illustrative of its intelligent satisfaction.

Some hours elapsed; and lighted by a brilliant moon with her chaste company of myriads of silver stars, the youth was borne onward. The external defiles of the Caucasus were being threaded; but those districts which constituted the veritable *wilds* of the mountain range were still unreachd. There was as yet no blending of the terrible and sublime: no perils nor dangers had as yet been encountered: the path had not as yet led along the edge of a precipice—and the sounds of the cascades were only heard from a distance. To an Englishman suddenly transported into that region which

Tunar was now traversing, the scenery would have seemed wild enough: but to the young Georgian who had often roamed amidst the mountains of his native land, it was a cheering and delightful prospect in comparison with the features and characteristics of those regions which still lay beyond.

After some hours of travelling, the steed stopped of its own accord in the middle of a little piece of tableland, covered with a soft grass, interspersed with trees, and with a crystal streamlets bisecting the spart as if with a meandering line of silver. Tunar, alighting from his saddle, bestowed the fondest and most enthusiastic caresses on the intelligent steed; and the animal appeared well pleased to have thus merited them. Having drunk copiously at the rivulet, the horse began to banquet on the sweet grass; while Tunar, having likewise refreshed himself at the stream, set to work to pluck the wild fruits with which some of the trees were laden. When he had thus appeased his hunger, he threw himself on the sward to rest: but not for an instant did he close his eyes in sleep: his mind was too active with a thousand different ideas to yield to the influence of slumber. More than ever was he convinced that the intelligent steed was retracing the same familiar route along which it had often borne its deceased master, the merchant Mansour; and to what destination could this route lead if not to the paradise cradled amidst the wilds of the Caucasus? Tunar experienced an ecstatic longing to enter into that delicious valley; and he even already deliberated with himself

whether he should settle down in that elysian seclusion for the remainder of his days—or whether he should possess himself of an adequate supply of the riches it contained, and seek in the great cities of Europe the luxuries and pleasures which such wealth would enable him to procure. It is true he now and then reflected that inasmuch as the entrance into the valley of Gulistan must be by some means or another carefully concealed, the steed might merely lead him into its vicinage, and there he would have to shift for himself in discovering the method of entering the vale. But his mind was too much elated with hope to allow these considerations to depress his spirits very materially. The impious youth—regardless of the fact the misdeeds of his life deserved the punishment instead of the favour of heaven—thought that there was something providential in the manner—in which he had been placed upon the track towards that secret paradise which had proved the temptation to lead him into devious paths of treacheries, perfidies, and villainies; and he exclaimed, as he sprang up from the green sward after an hour's rest, "It never could be intended that I should be conducted to the very threshold of this terrestrial elysium without being permitted to force open the door after all!"

He remounted his steed; and without giving the slightest impulse to the animal, suffered it to pursue its own route. The horse wound its way along the bank of the rivulet for about a quarter of a mile, until a lightning-blasted tree was reached; and at this spot the

steed began to ford the stream. The opposite bank was in a few moments reached: the remainder of the table-land was crossed; and then a steep winding path led down into a ravine. This was the most difficult and dangerous portion of the journey which Tunar had as yet experienced; though at the same time he felt assured it was insignificant in comparison with the perils which must be encountered in the districts that lay beyond. He could not help admiring the sagacious caution, as well as the firmness and steadiness with which the steed pursued its way; and he wondered not that Mansour should have been so much attached to the sure-footed animal which had so often borne him along these mountain-paths to the place of the destination.

During the hours which intervened betwixt the resumption of the journey from the stream-bisected table-land to the moment when the dawn began to appear in the east, the ride was continued more slowly than during the earlier portion of the night; for the features of the region were becoming more and more difficult and dangerous. At length, when the sun burst forth in all the glowing splendour with which it rises in those climes, the intelligent steed turned abruptly out of the path which it was previously pursuing, and made its way through a lane which seemed to have been cut out in the midst of a solid rock, and which was so narrow that Tunar's knees almost brushed against the rugged sides. This lane continued for about a hundred yards; and then suddenly ceasing, it revealed a small open space bounded on the farther side

by a mass of beetling rock. In the face of this rock there was the entrance into a cave; and the steed, trotting straight up to it; stopped short.

Tunar at once comprehended that this was another halting-place; and the thrilling hope seized upon him that it might probably be the entrance into the paradise of Gulistan itself. He sprang from the saddle; and the steed at once trotted into the cavern, just as if it were taking its way to its own well-known stable. Tunar followed: but he was speedily entombed in darkness; and he stooped short, as the animal had already done some little way ahead within the bowels of that rock. His ear now caught the rippling and gurgling of a streamlet, together with the sound made by the horse while drinking copiously of the refreshing element. Then the steed walked forth from the cave again, and began feasting on the grass which grew in sweet luxuriance on the open space outside. If any scintillation of a doubt had existed in Tunar's mind relative to the animal's sagacity with regard to the route it had been pursuing,—if for a moment he had fancied that it was mere haphazard after all, and that the sanguine enthusiasm of his own mind had given a colouring to the circumstances of the journey,—such doubt would have now been completely dispelled: for it was evident beyond the possibility of mistake that the intelligent steed was really well acquainted with this spot.

Yet a little reflection soon convinced Tunar that it was a mere halting-place, and that it was not the entrance to the Vale of Gulistan

itself. For there was evidently no trouble taken to conceal it:—any traveller amidst the mountains might find his way to this cavern; and therefore it assuredly was *not* the threshold of a paradise which had been so jealously and successfully concealed from the knowledge of the world in general.

Tunar was as much athirst as his horse had recently been; and he began to grope his way through the darkness of the cavern towards the rivulet. The sounds of the rippling waters guided him: but still, as the echoes of the cave were deceptive, he could not estimate at what distance the brink of the stream might be; and ignorant likewise of its depth, he feared lest he might suddenly fall into it. Stretching out his arms, he felt for the walls of the cavern. His right hand encountered the side of the rugged rock; and then the next moment it touched some object so cold that Tunar withdrew his hand in affright, while the blood suddenly turned to ice in his veins, and a cry of horror burst from his lips; for his first impression was that his hand had encountered a coiled-up snake. But all was still—no hissing reptile had been disturbed; and now, as Tunar began to regain his self-possession, he reflected that the object which he had touched in the deep darkness of the cavern felt more like the coldness of metal than the horrible chill of a snake. He thrust out his hand again; and he felt that it was a lamp which a few instants before had so startled and dismayed him.

A lamp standing in a niche! Then doubtless there was likewise the means of procuring a light?

Tunar felt in that niche; and his search was crowned by success. In a few moments a match was glimmering in his hand; and he beheld a common iron lamp, containing a wick, the blackened rim of which showed that it had been before used. He lighted the wick: he now perceived that there was a small tin can in the niche:—this proved to be half filled with oil, so that there was every requisite for the maintenance of a light in that cavern.

Tunar now glanced around him; and he discovered that the cavern penetrated about twenty yards into the bosom of the rock, its width being only as many feet where it was widest. At the extremity a rill trickled from the side—the limpid water falling into a species of basin hollowed in the floor of the cavern, and having some outlet which was concealed from the eye, but the existence of which was evident from the fact that the basin always remained filled without overflowing. Tunar, however, forgot his thirst for the moment, because there were other objects in the niche where stood the lamp that he had lighted. There were three or four bottles, each containing a remnant of the fluids which had no doubt originally filled them: and besides these objects, there were some portions of provisions, but so mouldy as to be uneatable and only just recognisable.

It naturally struck Tunar that the bottles had accompanied the more substantial provender, and that they might therefore still contain something which would cheer him after his journey. He cautiously tested their remaining contents; and then he hesitated

not to imbibe a deeper draught of the delicious wine which he had thus come across. He afterwards refreshed himself with a draught from the streamlet: then perceiving a quantity of grass spread upon the floor of the cave, he lay down to rest himself; and though his thoughts were as active as ever, he nevertheless now yielded to a sense of weariness, and he sank into slumber.

On awaking, Tunar could judge by the height of the sun that he had not slept more than a couple of hours. He was exceedingly hungry: but a moderate draught from one of the bottles in the niche subdued the sensation of sickness in the stomach: and he resolved to continue his journey. He was about to remount the steed—which was quietly feeding upon the grass—when he thought to himself he might as well take with him the lamp, the oil, and the means of striking a light. For who could tell of what service they might sooner or later prove, and how for they might assist him in discovering the entrance into the Vale of Gulistan? He likewise possessed himself of the remainder of the wines, now all mixed together in one bottle for the convenience of portability; and he resumed his journey.

Tunar, as hitherto, suffered the steed to follow its own sagacious instincts; and the animal, after re-threading the little lane—which was either formed by nature or cut by the hand of man through the rock—pursued the path whence that lane diverged. The scenery upon which Tunar now shortly entered was a blending of the sublime and beautiful. There were

luxuriant valleys and wood-covered hills—crystal streamlets and thundering cascades. Wild fruits abounded; and with these Tunar was enabled to appease his hunger. In the distance arose lofty mountains, some of the tallest being capped with snow, though it was the beginning of the delicious autumn season. But with the sublime and beautiful the terrible began presently to blend itself. The valleys deepened into ravines, and their hitherto gradual slopes were succeeded by frightful precipices. Yawning chasms appeared to open at the traveller's feet: the path often led along the brink of a precipice on one hand, with a wall of barren, rugged, towering rock on the other. Louder became the din of the waterfall—more furious the gush of the sounding cataract. Tunar was now fairly amidst the wilds of the Caucasus.

But the good steed continued its way with sagacious intelligence and with firmness of foot. At those times when Tunar shuddered and shrank within himself at the appalling nature of the path which he was pursuing, the animal moved along as if with the most unruffled self-confidence; and not once did its foot trip or was a false step made. At length Tunar acquired courage from the steady resoluteness of the animal which he bestrode; and in this manner was the journey continued for several hours.

There was another halt in the afternoon; and this took place on a spot where there was verdant grass, and where fruit trees had their roots watered by a purling stream. At a short distance a pile of stones was heaped up, evidently

by a human hand; and for an ordinary traveller amidst those regions it might have been a matter of some astonishment why any person should have taken the trouble to perform such a task. But to Tunar's mind every peculiar object had its significance; and this pile of stones, apparently useless in an ordinary estimation, was to him fraught with all the meaning of a landmark. He had no doubt that many other objects, likewise serving as landmarks, but which he had failed thus to recognise, had been passed by him on the route: or else how could the steed have guided itself amidst the labyrinthine maze of hill, valley, crag, rock, and mountain—ravine and defile—which made up the wild and intricate scenery of the Caucasus?

After a halt of about three hours—for the youth was careful not to tax too much the energies of the willing steed—the journey was resumed. Wilder more sublime, and more perilous became the scenery. Indeed, we cannot here do better than borrow the language in which Thekla had addressed Leila and Myrrha when describing to those ladies the latter portion of her journey into the heart of the Caucasus. "Picture to yourselves yawning precipices and towering mountains—glaciers, and thundering cataracts—horrible ravines, and colossal heights capped with snow,—imagine all this, and you will have some faint idea of the grand, the dread, and the awful features of the scenery by which I was surrounded."

It was amidst these regions that Tunar pursued his way, until the evening was closing in. Then

through the gathering gloom he beheld a little grotto in which a crucifix was suspended. This temple of Christian worship, cradled amidst the wilds of the Caucasus, was not above four feet high: it was rudely but solidly constructed; and in front of the opening was a large stone, evidently intended to serve as a kneeling-place for any traveller who might choose to perform his worship there.

The steed now set forth a neighing sound expressive of delight: and it made a caracole or caper indicative of the same feeling. Tunar felt assured that another halting-place was reached; and the idea even struck him that the journey itself might be at an end; for on no former occasion when a resting-spot was gained, had the steed exhibited so marked and lively a satisfaction. A few minutes brought our traveller to the opening of a cavern; and there the horse stopped short of its own accord. Tunar alighted; the animal trotted into the cave, with the same familiar knowledge of its whereabouts as it had exhibited in respect to the former cavern. Tunar, immediately lighting his lamp, penetrated also into the cave,—where he found the horse drinking at a stream which flowed completely through the cavern at the farther extremity, issuing from the rock itself, and disappearing the youth knew not whither.

Tunar refreshed himself with a copious draught of the limpid element; and he then began to inspect the interior of the cave. It was considerably larger than the former one: it contained a niche wherein was placed an iron lamp similar to that of which he had already pos-

essed himself; there were likewise the means for striking a light—and there was a supply of oil. In addition to these articles there was a bottle half filled with an exquisite cordial; and there were some provisions, all of which were mouldy and decayed with the exception of a small jar of potted meat from which a portion had been taken—but the remainder was in excellent preservation. Tunar at once recognised this comestible as having emanated from the deceased merchant's house, where it was wont to be made according to a peculiar receipt which Mansour himself had furnished. This was another proof that Tunar was on the right track and that he was now in the very cavern which his murdered master had been accustomed to make a halting place when paying a visit to the Vale of Gulistan. The youth ate of the delicacy which he had discovered, and which was most grateful to an appetite that had hitherto been compelled to appease its cravings with fruit. There was a quantity of cropped grass dried into hay, in the cavern; and on this the steed was already banqueting. Tunar had no thought of resuming his journey that night, if indeed it had ~~to be resumed~~ at all:—he accordingly took off the animal's saddle and bridle—and he stretched himself in the cave to rest.

Sleep soon came over him: but he awoke at an early hour in the morning, just as the sunbeams began to glimmer in the orient heaven. The jar of potted meat furnished his breakfast; and he partook of a small quantity of the cordial, which heightened his already elevated and buoyant spirits.

He had now to ascertain whether the journey was to be continued; and this discovery was to be made through the sagacity of his steed. He put on the saddle and bridle—he caressed and petted the animal for a few minutes; then leading the horse out of the cavern, he got upon its back. The steed was by no means unwilling to set out again; but it immediately began to retrace its way. Tunar suffered it to proceed thus for about a mile, in order to ascertain whether it might turn off into some other direction: but no!—it kept steadily along the same route which had brought him thither on the preceding evening.

“The horse has evidently been no farther than the cavern,” said Tunar to himself; and wheeling the animal round, he made it retrace its way to the cave.

There he again took off the saddle and bridle, and left the horse to pasture at its will upon the grass which grew in sweet luxuriance in the vicinage of that cavern. It was evident that the steed could serve him no farther in following up the clue to the whereabouts of the terrestrial paradise, and that he must now shift for himself. Perhaps that very cavern afforded an entrance into the Vale of Roses?—for it had been hollowed deep into the bowels of an immense towering rock, and Tunar knew not what lay behind that vast natural rampart. Again lighting a lamp, he examined the cavern with the most minute scrutiny: but he could discover no trace of any hidden door—no means of egress except the great opening of the cave's mouth itself. Having thus fruitlessly searched for up-

wards of an hour, Tunar extinguished the lamp and issued from the cave. He wandered about in the vicinage, studying all the features of the scenery, in the hope of being enabled to form a conjecture relative to the site of the mountain-girt valley.

It will be remembered that the first insight the youth had ever obtained into the existence of the Vale of Gulistan, was by catching a glimpse of one of Mansour's documents on the occasion when the merchant was absent for a few moments from the apartment where he had been writing. The very passage on which the eye of Tunar had settled at the time, was the one that contained a description of the Valley of Roses. Tunar now sat himself down with his face buried in his hands, to tax his memory and recall every syllable of the description—or rather, we should say, of as much as he had been enabled to read of it on the occasion to which we have referred.

"A PARADISE HEMMED IN BY A CIRCULAR CHAIN OF HEIGHTS INACCESSIBLE FROM WITHOUT AND FROM WITHIN! These were the words of the description," continued Tunar in his musings. "Inaccessible heights! Yes—it is clear, as I have always thought, that there must be some caverned entrance through the bowels of those mountains into the elysian valley. It is a cavern, then, which I must seek! Perhaps the mouth itself is closed with piled-up stones?—perhaps it may be but a very small opening, stooped up with earth or the branches of trees, or otherwise cunningly concealed?—or perhaps there may be a door cut out of the

rock itself and so skilfully fixed in its setting as to escape the notice of a casual observer? In the first instance, therefore, it is necessary I should find a circular chain of mountains the configuration and the inaccessibility of which may prove at the outset that they are veritably the rampart enclosing the hidden paradise."

With this reflection Tunar rose from his seat, and renewed his wanderings, about the region in which he found himself. This was indeed one of the wildest parts of the Caucasus: mountain seemed to be heaped upon mountain, as if the beaten giants had been there, piling Ossa upon Pelion. The longer Tunar contemplated that scenery so stupendously sublime, the more was he bewildered—the more difficult did he find the task which he had undertaken. There were deep ravines, in the profundities of which rolled the waters that cascaded down with an almost deafening din from the towering heights: sometimes his way was barred by a deep yawning chasm—sometimes by a wall of rock. Frequently did he fancy that he beheld traces of a beaten path—but if a path it were, it led only to a precipice! Ever and anon he beheld a range of the loftiest mountains which seemed to take, in their continuous configuration, a circular form: but when more closely inspected they dispelled the hope—for suddenly there was a break in the line of them, and a horrible ravine or else a dark gloomy wood was discovered in their midst. While pursuing these wanderings, Tunar was careful to mark his route in various ways, so

that he might be enabled to retrace it: he piled up stones—he cut notches in trees—he gathered grass on the spots where it grew and scattered in upon the barren places. Thus after many weary hours of fruitless wanderings, Tunar retraced his way to the cavern, considerably dispirited, but still far from hopeless.

So sanguine was he at the outset that he had fancied he should be enabled to find the entrance to the valley in an hour: but now a day had passed and it was not discovered. A week might elapse—a month—a year: but still Tunar was resolved to prosecute his search!

"I now live only for this object," he said to himself; "and I will achieve it. To stand upon the threshold of so wondrous a discovery, and then retreat pusillanimously, dispirited, and crestfallen, because the first few hours of search have proved unavailing—no, no!—I will not do it!"

But while Tunar was thus giving way to his reflections as he lay stretched in the cavern, thoroughly exhausted with his day's wanderings,—other considerations began to steal into his mind.

"Klodissa has obtained possession of the documents," he said to himself, "and they have taught her all the secret. She will doubtless becoming hitherto avail herself of that knowledge! Ah! if she were to come alone, I would be signally revenged for the treatment. I received at her hands! But she may *not* come alone? She may bring an escort with her to a certain point: and that point would doubtless be this cavern? Or perhaps she may reveal the secret to Danial and Leila, towards whom

she evidently cherishes so strong a friendship? In any case it is unlikely she will come alone and unattended. If I be discovered here, my motive will be but too apparent—my object will be only too well understood; and death may be my portion? Yes—because Klodissa may fancy that despite the assurance I gave her to the contrary, I had really made myself acquainted with the contents of those documents before I buried them in the earth. She would conceive that I had come thus far in order to avail myself of the information derived from those documents: she would not believe the tale of my fruitless wanderings of this day—nor would she attach the slightest credence to the explanation that I am indebted to the sagacity of the steed for being here at all. No!—she would be impressed with the conviction that I was in every way deceiving her; and she would deem me worthy of death. Thus, if she come with an escort, my doom will be sealed. And who can tell at what moment she may thus come? Is she likely to tarry elsewhere or suffer a long delay to elapse ere she penetrates into these wilds to render available the sublime secret which is in her possession?"

Terrified by these considerations, Tunar started up from his recumbent posture in the cave; and he looked forth from the entrance. The moon and stars were now shining brightly; and he was resolved to leave the spot where he incurred so much peril of being discovered. To caparison the steed was the work of but a few minutes; and he was careful to take with him one of the lamps, the entire

supply of oil, the potted meat, the wine, and the cordial. Mounting the animal, he rode slowly away, —not retracing the route which had brought him thither on the preceding evening, but penetrating farther into the wilds of the Caucasus. When at a distance of about a league from the cavern, Tunar halted on a verdant spot, where a streamlet was supplied by a neighbouring cascade, and where fruit-trees abounded. It was here that he resolved to remain, at least for the present: for though he had quitted the cavern as a matter of precaution, he was determined to run any risk on the part of Klodissa and her escort (if she should come with one), rather than renounce his search for the blooming Vale of Roses.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE APPROACH TO GULISTAN.

IT WAS in the evening of the second day after Tunar had left the cavern in the manner just described, that three persons arrived there. These were Prince Danial, the Princess Leila and Klodissa. Springing from his steed, our young hero assisted our heroine and the swarthy-complexioned female to descend from theirs. Then from a bag hanging to his saddle and containing various articles, Prince Danial drew forth a small lamp and a bottle of oil, together with material for striking a light. A light was soon obtained; and he led the steeds into the cavern, Leila and Klodissa following.

"Ah! there is a lamp in this niche!" observed Danial, as he

caught sight of the one which Tunar had felt behind.

"But there is no oil," added Klodissa, glancing into the same niche and perceiving nothing but the iron lamp. "It was fortunate that the worthy and lamented Mansour's description of the two caverns should have been so minute as to prove suggestive of the expediency of bringing with us the means of procuring alight."

"Yes—it was fortunate that we took the precaution," said Leila: "for though the deceased merchant's manuscript affirms that lamps and oil would be found in both caverns, yet in the first we discovered neither, and in this one only the lamp."

"But in other respects," said Danial, "how accurate were his descriptions! and with what careful minuteness were they detailed! To think that we should have found our way for so many, many leagues to a particular point in the heart of the very wildest region of the Caucasus, by means of such landmarks as particular features of scenery, peculiar groups of trees, piles of stones heaped up——"

"Yes, it is extraordinary!" exclaimed Leila. "And yet, not—for after all, the process of following up the clue was a comparatively easy one."

"So carefully and so accurately," said Klodissa, who always spoke in a low and subdued tone, "was the itinerary mapped out in the deceased merchant's description!"

"And now," exclaimed Danial, "we have reached our destination so far as our steeds could bring us; and to-morrow, Leila—to-morrow, Klodissa," he cried, with a rapturous feeling, "a short halt.

hour's walk will take us to that earthly paradise the secret of which is all our own!"

While the steeds were slaking their thirst at the streamlet which flowed through the inner extremity of the cave, Prince Danial had taken off their saddles; and he now relieved them of their bridles. To each saddle was attached a large bag of corn; and thus provender was in readiness for the animals. Having attended to their wants, the young Prince opened the bag to which we have before alluded; and thence he drew forth a variety of provisions, which he spread upon the floor of the cave. He and his companions sat down to their repast; and when it was concluded, the young Prince went forth to gather a quantity of grass, that Leila and Klodissa might have something softer to repose upon than the hard floor of the cavern. With the herbage thus gathered, he spread their couch,—over which he placed the draperies belonging to the housings of their saddles; and having thus attended to their comforts, he wrapped himself in his cloak and lay down to rest, at a respectful distance close by the mouth of the cave. The reader will bear in mind that the dried grass which Tanar had found in the cavern had been eaten by the steed which brought him thither: and thus it was that the proceedings adopted by Danial were necessitated for ensuring the comfort of Leila and Klodissa.

They all three slept peacefully throughout the night; and when they awoke in the morning, Danial led forth the horses to banquet upon the rich herbage which grew in the neighbourhood. He then retired

to a stream at a little distance, to perform his own ablutions,—thus with delicate consideration leaving the Princess and Klodissa to themselves for a while in the cavern. Danial contemplated the sublime and stupendous scenery amidst which he found himself; but it was chiefly in a north-western direction that he bent his gaze; and with a feeling of holy rapture he thought within himself, "It is *there* that the terrestrial paradise is cradled amidst the mountains!"

On retracing his way towards the cavern, Prince Danial beheld the Princess Leila and Klodissa standing at a short distance from the entrance, both with their regards fixed in that north-western direction towards which he himself had so earnestly been looking.

"Does it not all appear a dream?" asked Leila, as Danial approached. "Can either of you realize in your own mind the fact that we are already standing as it were upon the threshold of that earthly elysium."

"Oh, it does indeed appear to be a dream!" said Klodissa, in a tone that was even lower than usual, for tamed to be subdued by the overpowering influence of her rapturous sensations.

"And yet it is a dream," observed Prince Danial, "which will this day receive its fulfilment. Oh, if the very instant, when the morning dawned, I did not exclaim, 'Come, let us lose not a moment; let us speed in the direction of the blessed vale!'—if I did not speak thus, it was because I felt that standing as we are on the very threshold of the sublime happiness in store for us, it were well to exhibit patience—to avoid rushing

with an indecent haste to the scene of those delights the very idea of which has something sacred and solemn in it!"

"Yes, Danial—and you were right!" said Leila. "For remember that the Vale of Gulistan is not merely a paradise of flowers and gems—of bright streamlets and a balmy atmosphere,—it is not merely a land flowing with milk and honey,—but it is also the last resting-place of our revered ancestor—the spot where he for so many years found refuge—and where at length," added Leila, solemnly, "he likewise found a grave!"

"All these considerations have been present in my mind," said Prince Danial; "and amidst the joyous feelings with which I shall set foot in the blooming valley, there will be pious and holy thoughts—thoughts for the lamented dead who is there sepulchred—and likewise for the worthy man to whose revelations we are indebted for the knowledge of this stupendous secret!"

There was a pause in the solemn conversation: and at length Prince Danial again breaking silence, said, as his own eyes and those of his companions were still fixed upon the north-west, "How admirable is that passage in the deceased Mansour's description where he remarks that all the scenery amidst which we now find ourselves appears to be so wildly confused that without the help of a guiding clue it would be utterly impossible for us to single out a particular line of mountains and say, 'There is the rampart enclosing the Vale of Gulistan!'"

"Nature appears to have indulg-

ed in all the wildest and most fantastic freaks in this region," said Leila,—“an indulgence which would seem purposeless to any ordinary travellers, ignorant of the existence of the blooming valley—but to our eyes full of a grand purpose: namely, that of concealing the terrestrial paradise from all save those favoured elect to whom the secret becomes known!"

"Yes," said Danial; "for the most intrepid hunter who will penetrate into every ravine or climb every accessible crag in pursuit of his game, might vainly attempt to fathom or to scale the tremendous natural barriers which surround that elysium! And when we contemplate those towering snow-capped heights," continued the Prince, now pointing, as well as looking in the direction of the north-west,—“when we trace the course of the yawning gulfs, or follow with our eyes the line of those horrid ravines—in a word, when we study the countless defence-works which nature has accumulated there, we cannot wonder that the secret of the existence of this paradise has been so well kept as to defy accidental discovery, and to be known only unto those to whom it becomes as it were a traditionary inheritance!"

"Almost as interesting as the description of the means of entering into the vale," said Leila, "are the erudite observations and comments which the deceased Mansour recorded at the close of the document which specially relates to the subject. To speculate upon the origin of the work which formed that mode of access, it is necessary, he says, to carry one's imagination back to the remotest

ages—yet only to be lost amidst the obscurity of that long bygone past, and to grope one's way about in the dark in the vain endeavour to find a date or a name!"

"It was therefore in an age of utter barbarism," observed Klodissa, "that the work must have been accomplished!"

"Ah, barbarism!" ejaculated Danial: "what do we mean by barbarism? Our civilization doubtless possesses a knowledge of many things unknown and undreamt of in those far-back ages whereof we are speaking: but, on the other hand, how many things may have belonged to their civilization which are lost to us? And who can tell but that what we at the present day boast of as civilization, would be held as barbarism in the eyes of the nation of past ages if they could but get up from their graves and look upon the earth as it now exists? What modern Pharaoh could issue a decree for building pyramids on the gigantic plan of those which have existed from the earliest times and which seem to belong to eternity itself? Ah! the barbarism of that long-past age—if barbarism it were—has left behind it a permanent monumental defiance to all the art and skill of this age of civilization! But, after all, need we wonder that the means of access to yon mountain-cradled valley should present such evidences of power and skill, when we think of all the mighty works which belonged to former ages? Look at the building of Solomon's Temple—or Babylon with its hanging gardens—or Thebes with its hundred gates! Everywhere throughout the known world exist the vestiges

of a lost civilization which must have been consummate in those far back ages to which we are so thoughtlessly accustomed to ascribe naught but a dark and gloomy barbarism. I have read that in Ireland—which is an island forming one of the British possessions in the seas that wash the western shores of Europe—there are round towers that must have been erected during a period of morning-light which preceded a night of whole centuries of darkness. I have read likewise that in England itself there are colossal masses of stone so piled up and placed one upon another that naught but a machinery as grand as the work itself could have achieved such a task. Yet no one can tell to what date that work belongs, nor what was the nature of the mechanism that performed it. Truly, therefore, there was in the olden time a wondrous civilization, which left its footprints upon the earth ere it departed to be succeeded by a long night of barbarism! We need not therefore invoke preternatural ideas to account for the work which we are about to behold, and which affords the means of entrance into the Vale of Roses!"

Leila listened with the deepest attention to her cousin Danial's remarks; and Klodissa appeared to do so—but the swarthy-complexioned female was in reality full of impatience to breathe the balmy atmosphere, gaze upon the flowers, pluck the fruit; and feast her eyes with the riches of the Vale of Gulistan.

The three travellers now re-entered the cavern—or rather seated themselves at the mouth of it—to partake of the morning repast. When they had finished,

Prince Danial said in a tone where solemn awe was blended with beatific rapture, "Now the moment is come when we may set forth upon our way to the valley."

They accordingly departed for the cavern, leaving the horses to feed upon the grass. Danial led the way, Leila following—Klodissa bringing up the rear. It was in a north-westerly direction that they proceeded; and for about ten minutes not a word was spoken. At the expiration of that interval Danial suddenly exclaimed, "Some traveller has recently been this way!"

"By what sign do you know it?" asked Leila.

"Look at this plucked grass which is scattered along the path!" exclaimed Danial. "Or it may be some wild animal that has done it?" he added, after a moment's reflection.

Again they went on; and in a few minutes the young Prince ejaculated, "Ah, a heap of stones! I recollect not any such landmark in Mansour's description of this portion of our route."

He drew forth from the breast of his buttoned-up frock-coat the document which specially related to the Vale of Roses; and while he read, Leila and Klodissa attentively watched his countenance.

"No," he said; "this landmark is not mentioned! The words are—'*On issuing from the cavern, fix your eyes upon that mountain in the north-west which seems as if its crest had been split in twain, and both peaks of which are covered with eternal snow: pursue the pass which seems to lead direct towards that mountain: you will find no landmarks nor guiding signs in*

that pass (for they are not needed) until you reach the edge of a precipice where the pass itself suddenly terminates. Then'—"

It is clear therefore, you see," said Danial, abruptly breaking off his reading from Mansour's manuscript, "that we ought to have expected no landmarks in this place: yet here is a heap of stones, evidently arranged by a human hand—the result of no accident! Ah, and perhaps the cropped grass which we ere now beheld strown upon the way, was likewise scattered there by a human hand?"

"Travellers may have been this way," suggested Leila, "and yet without any thought or purpose at all identical with the object that has led us hither."

Klodissa said nothing: the image of Tunar had flashed into her mind; and she was reflecting profoundly. Perhaps he had deceived her in his assurance that he was unacquainted with the contents of the document? perhaps he had really read them previous to entering them in the deceased merchant's garden. Perhaps he had made these landmarks for his own guidance, and as a means of retracing his way from the valley into which he might have already penetrated? perhaps indeed he was at this very moment wandering amidst the delights of Gulistan itself?

"If so," thought Klodissa within her own mind—"and if we find him there, my poniard shall drink his heart's blood without pity and without remorse!"

"Let us continue our way," said Prince Danial; "for our purposes need not be affected by any surmise which these singular

appearances may possibly engender. We shall soon ascertain whether there be other landmarks attributable to some strange hand in the route which we have yet to pursue."

They proceeded accordingly,—their way still lying through a pass amidst the mountains, over a rugged and uneven ground where the feet of horses might not tread. In a few minutes they reached the extremity of the pass, which terminated at a precipice fringed by trees and wild shrubs.

Little did they suspect that at this moment their proceedings were watched by the eyes of a keen observer who was concealed at a short distance. But so it was;—and that observer was Tunar. The jutting angle of a rock hid him from their view. With palpitating heart and throbbing brain—full indeed of a feverish and anxious suspense—he was thus watching them in the hope of obtaining through their means that clue for which he had been three whole days vainly searching.

They had halted, as we have said, on the verge of a precipice fringed with shrubs and trees, which overhung a deep yawning gulf in whose depths a torrent rolled. Danial again consulted the deceased merchant's manuscript, in order that he might minutely follow its detailed instructions without the slightest risk of taking an erroneous step through trusting too much to his memory. Tunar, in his place of concealment, wondered what those whom he was spying would next do, and how their route could possibly be continued from the point which they had now reached. His curio-

sity was soon gratified. Prince Danial forced his way through the shrubs at the point where they were thickest; and for an instant it seemed to Tunar as if he were insanely walking over the brink of the precipice to fall into the abyss beneath. But Leila and Klodissa followed him: the shrubs closed again—and they were hidden from the youth's view.

Now Tunar darted forth from his hiding-place; and speeding to the very same spot where Danial, Leila, and Klodissa had thus disappeared, he parted the same shrubs and looked through the opening. To his surprise he discerned the commencement of a sloping path which ran like a ledge, slantwise, down the entire face of the precipice, and yet with a descent so gradual as to be devoid of all dangerous precipitousness itself. It was completely fringed with trees and shrubs on the side overlooking the abyss, so that there was really no peril for even a dizzy head in descending this path. At a distance of about fifty yards from its commencement it took a winding direction, as it followed the configuration of the wall of the precipice itself; and thus Danial, Leila, and Klodissa were soon lost to Tunar's view once more.

"If I had searched for a thousand years," said the youth to himself, "I never should have discovered this strangely hidden path! Who, on reaching a precipice which seems to lead to nothing but a gulf into which another forward step would plunge one down, could possibly conceive that there was a safe and convenient route thus craftily concealed? But I must follow!"

His heart palpitating with a wilder hope than ever, Tunar passed amidst the shrubs and began the descent of the path. He found that all along its inner side, as it were, the wall of rock had so been hollowed as to give width to that which was doubtless only a very narrow natural ledge in the first instance. Thus, by the overhanging of the rock itself, the path was still more effectually concealed, supposing that anyone peeping over the edge of the precipice itself should have looked down into the abyss.

After a while the windings of the path afforded Tunar a glimpse of the garments of Klodissa, who brought up the rear of the little party that was in front of him. He hung back for a few moments: then he continued his way—and he found that the path terminated quite at the bottom of the ravine, leading down to the very brink of the torrent which roared and thundered through its depths. But across the boiling eddying waters two large trees were thrown, cut down from a line which fringed that side of the torrent; so that whenever the trees thus felled should yield to decay, it would only be the work of one stout arm and one sharp axe to level another bridge across the eddying waters. On the opposite side there was a forest of trees and wild shrubs, which clothed the slope of the ravine; and in the midst of this wood Danial, Leila, and Klodissa, having already crossed the bridge, were again lost to Tunar's view.

But the youth hesitated not to follow. He likewise crossed the bridge, and began to pursue a winding path which led amongst

the trees: but not before he had flung a glance all along the ravine, to make himself acquainted with the features of its wild scenery. Rapid though that glance were, it showed him sufficient to convince him that the long sloping ledgelike path by which he had descended on the face of the precipice, constituted the only possible means by which the bottom of the ravine could be reached.

"The secret of the approach to the Vale of Gulistan is indeed well guarded!" said Tunar to himself; and again he added, "I might have searched for a thousand years without discovering it!"

He sped onward: again he caught a glimpse of Klodissa's dress: but the nature of the path, winding upwards amidst the trees, allowed him to follow at a short distance without the danger of being perceived. On that side of the ravine where the course of our travellers now lay, the ascent was gradual: and in about ten minutes the mouth of a cavern was reached. Into this cavern Danial, Leila, and Klodissa entered; while Tunar concealed behind the angle of a jutting rock, watched the way which they were thus taking.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DEPTHS OF THE CAVERN.

TUNAR had not the slightest doubt that this cavern contained the entrance into the Vale of Gulistan: for the ravine in the side of which the cave opened lay at the foot of a mass of towering mountains, a glance over the rugged exterior of which showed that they were utterly inaccessible to the foot of man.

There was a burning joy in Tunar's heart; for, again in an impious mood, he thought that heaven was now, as if by seeming accident, affording the sequence to that other providential episode which, in reference to the sagacity of the deceased merchant's steed, had brought him into the very neighbourhood where the Valley of Roses was situated.

Danial, Leila, and Klodissa had entered, as we have already said, into the cavern; while Tunar remained concealed behind a jutting angle of rock.

He was afraid to follow immediately; he knew not what might be the extent of the cavern—he feared that if he entered too precipitately, he might fall into the hands of those who had preceded him thither. In such a case he knew full well that even if the magnanimous Danial should be inclined to spare his life, his doom would nevertheless be sealed in another quarter; for, as he said to himself, "The intrepid and vindictive Klodissa would not suffer me to live!"

Therefore for upwards of ten minutes did Tunar remain motionless behind the angle of the rocks—his ear keenly alive to catch the sounds of any returning footsteps, so that he might dart away into the dense shade of the trees and conceal himself from the view of those who would only look upon him as a spy and an enemy.

But all continued silent: there were no echoes of returning footsteps—no sound of voices in conversation.

Tunar peeped forth from behind the rock; and he beheld the black mouth of the cavern, into the

depths of which his eyes could not penetrate.

"They have assuredly passed into the blooming vale!" he said to himself. "Ah! perhaps at this moment they are rejoicing in the possession of the secret of that paradise!"

Tunar summoned all his courage to his aid; and he slowly advanced towards the cavern; but he was careful to skirt the wall of rugged rocks which led towards its mouth, so as to be concealed from the view of those who might possibly be within the cave itself.

In a few minutes he reached the opening: he listened—all was still: he strained his eyes to plunge his looks into the cavern's depths—but if his regards had encountered a wall of black marble they could not have been more effectually stopped than they were by the utter darkness that reigned within that mysterious place.

"If I penetrate thither," thought Tunar himself, "the darkness would as completely veil me from the observation of those others as it would assuredly conceal themselves from my view. If I hear the slightest sound of footsteps or of voices, I can stand back against the side of the cavern—I can remain perfectly still—no one need suspect my presence there—and I shall be safe! But why all these apprehensive thoughts? They cannot be any longer in the cavern! No, no!—they are already roaming amidst the delights of Gulistan!"

Tunar penetrated into the cavern: he proceeded with noiseless steps—he was speedily entombed in utter darkness—he stretched out both his arms to protect himself

against any jutting object with which he might otherwise come in concussion. In this manner he advanced, nothing impeding his way—no sound reaching his ears—and his feet treading easily upon the level floor of the cavern.

On he went: the cave was evidently of considerable length: already had he proceeded to a distance treble as great as the length of either of the other caverns into which he had penetrated when pursuing his journey into the heart of the Caucasus.

At last, when he had thus advanced for at least two hundred yards in that subterranean in the bowels of the mountains, his right hand encountered a wall of rock on one side, and his left a wall of rock on the other.

It was evident that the cavern was becoming narrower and narrower the farther he plunged into it; and the youth therefore thought that its extremity could now be at no very great distance.

Still he advanced, but even more cautiously and guardedly, if possible, than hitherto; for he was afraid of coming too suddenly against whatsoever object, whether wall or door, that might close the end of the cavern.

It was in the midst of a pitchy blackness that he was thus advancing, surrounded by a more than Egyptian darkness—a Cimmerian depth of gloom to which the eyes could not possibly become accustomed. It was as if he were totally blind: it was a darkness that might be felt!

"The secret mode of entrance from this cavern into the valley must at least be an easy one," thought Tunar to himself, "if it

can be discovered in the midst of a darkness so profound as this. Perhaps on reaching the extremity, it is but to stretch forth a hand to open a door?"

But here the youth suddenly stopped short; for his foot kicked against some obstacle, which he however immediately discovered, by stooping down and feeling with his hands, to be nothing but a step.

Ascending that one step, Tunar advanced very slowly—groping his way with the utmost caution,—when all in a moment his right hand encountered a cold slimy object; and a cry of horror burst from his lips.

He turned and began to retreat with as much celerity as the nature of the place and the utter darkness would permit. His hair was standing on end beneath his cap—the blood had all curdled in his veins—a cold perspiration had burst out all over him. For that he had laid his hand upon the slimy folds of an immense coiled-up snake he had not the slightest doubt!

This time he was confident that there was no delusion, as was the case when he had touched the cold iron lamp in the first cavern into whose depths he had penetrated during his journey into the wilds of the Caucasus.

No!—it could not now be a deception of the fancy! for over the hideous coils he was confident his hand had passed; and so terribly vivid was the frightful incident in his mind, that he could not even form an idea of the monstrous thickness of the reptile which he had so touched.

How Tunar got out of the cave he scarcely knew when he burst into the light of day and into the

fresh air again; and then, at the mouth of the cavern he sank down, overpowered by the horrible feelings against which in his very desperation he had struggled long enough to effect his escape from the vicinage of the object of his terror. Yes—he sank down; for his legs bent under him—he was panting and gasping—a ghastly pallor was upon his countenance—and he was bathed, as it were, in the exudation of his own appalling horror. All that he recollected in reference to his rapid egress from the cavern, after the moment his hand had been shudderingly snatched away from its hideous contact with the slimy folds of the reptile, was that a thousand times during the space of a few agonizing minutes, he dreaded lest the serpent should be gliding after him—that it should suddenly dart upon him—that it should seize him with its fangs, or that its tremendous coils should be flung around him. No wonder, therefore, if on gaining the mouth of the cavern, he sank down in horror and consternation—that he gasped for breath—and that he writhed with convulsive shuddering, and trembled and quivered coldly throughout his entire being!

Many minutes elapsed ere the youth began to recover even in the slightest degree from the horrible feelings which had thus taken possession of him; and then, rising from the ground, he reeled away from the mouth of the cavern. He retraced his steps through the wood which clothed that side of the ravine: he reached the bridge formed by the trees thrown across the boiling torrent; and there he stopped short.

“What am I doing?” he

passionately asked himself. “Coward that I must be! I am fleeing away from that terrestrial paradise—I am abandoning that valley of inestimable treasures to which heaven itself by a variety of wondrous circumstances had guided me!”

Yet, though Tunar thus reproached himself with a dastard spirit, he could not pluck up his courage sufficiently to return to the cavern. No!—not for worlds would he have plunged again into that darkness, to encounter the horrors; of the coiled-up snake. He was lost in astonishment at the evident fact that Danial, Leila, and Klo-dissa had escaped from the reptile; and the idea stole into his mind that one of the mysteries connected with the means of obtaining admission into the Vale of Gulistan must be the power to charm the serpent into innocuous quiescence. And then this thought seemed to account to Tunar for the fact of the reptile having remained so still when he touched it, instead of darting at him and taking his life. Doubtless, therefore, it was still under the influence of the charm which those who had preceded him thither had known how to exercise upon it?—and by this solution only could he account for the mystery of his life being saved.

To return, therefore, to the cavern under present circumstances was not to be thought of; and Tunar continued to retrace his way out of the ravine. He ascended the sloping path against the face of the rock; and he reached the fringe of trees and shrubs that overhung the precipice to which it led up. Passing amidst those shrubs, he again stood upon the spot where he had first beheld Danial, Leila,

and Klodissa, at the moment when his heart had beaten with the exultant hope that by following them he should obtain a complete clue to the entrance into the Vale of Roses.

And now what course did Tunar propose to adopt? Would he abandon the idea of ever penetrating into the valley of Gulistan? No—impossible! He had at no great distance the means of procuring a light; he had likewise firearms, consisting of brace of excellent pistols which he had brought with him as well as his sword his lodgings at Tiflis; and availing himself of all those means, he would at a more fitting opportunity penetrate anew into the cavern and kill the reptile which harboured there. But when would this opportunity present itself? Tunar was already settling his plans in his mind. By the aid of the landmarks he himself had formed—by the notches cut in the trees, by the stones heaped up, by the grass strown upon the path—he was enabled to find his way to the cave that was at no great distance. There he beheld the three horses belonging to Danial, Leila, and Klodissa, quietly banqueting upon the grass,—tethered by ropes long enough to afford them a sufficient range, and adequately secured to prevent them straying from the spot. Inside the cave he found sacks of corn, and also the bag containing provisions and other requisites for the three travellers themselves.

"It is as I thought," said Tunar to himself: "they halted here."

He touched nothing belonging to those individuals to whom he thus alluded: but he took his

speedy departure from the cave, saying to himself, "By the nature of their arrangements it is evident that they are making but a brief visit to the Vale of Roses. Tomorrow or next day they will doubtless depart?—perhaps even this very day? When I know that they are gone, I may pursue my own course without molestation at their hands. Then for one daring and desperate exploit—a conflict with that loathsome reptile!—and the means of entrance into the Vale of Gulistan will be within my reach!"

It was thus that Tunar settled his plans: and he retraced his way to the spot whereat, about a league's distance from the cave, he had fixed his temporary abode. On reaching that spot he found the sagacious and docile steed which had borne him into those wilds, feasting upon the grass; and having caressed the animal, Tunar entered a little cave which he had discovered in the neighbourhood. There for a few hours he abandoned himself to his reflection, until the cravings of hunger warned him that it was time to think of his repast. He lighted a fire with some dry wood which he had collected; and he proceeded to cook some steaks of a buck which he had killed on the preceding day. The adjacent fruit trees afforded him a delicious dessert; he drank copiously from the waters of the crystal streamlet which meandered near his cave; and he presently regaled himself with a draught of the wine, which was not as yet quite exhausted.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Tunar had thus finished his repast; and he was

seated by the side of the streamlet, again buried in his reflections, when the sound of horses' hoofs suddenly startled him. He sprang to his feet, and grasped his weapons; for the idea instantaneously occurred to him that Danial, Leila and Klodissa must be coming that way. But on this point he was almost immediately reassured; for instead of those three persons, he beheld two horsemen advancing from a little distance. An ejaculation of surprise burst from Tunar's lips when he perceived that these horsemen were none others than Kyri Karaman and Djemzet. They too recognised Tunar; and they were soon upon the spot where their appearance had so startled him.

They were both dressed in the true style of the Caucasian Guerillas: their rifles were slung at their backs; they had pistols in the holsters of their saddles—pistols likewise in their belts—and swords by their sides. Indeed Kyri Karaman looked himself again, save and except that instead of leading a gallant troop, he had but a single follower on the occasion. But whether the faithful Djemzet was the only retainer he now possessed will presently transpire. "What! you here, amidst the wilds of the Caucasus?" exclaimed Kyri Karaman, as he sprang from his steed and thus addressed himself to Tunar.

"We knew that you had been acquitted of all charges against you," added Djemzet, likewise dismounting: "but little did we expect to encounter you in these regions!"

"Am I not a wanderer and an outcast on the face of the earth?"

exclaimed Tunar; "and whither should I go—where should I seclude myself, if not in such solitudes as these?"

"But why did you not remain in Tiflis?" asked Kyri Karaman. "Deeply disguised, I ventured into the neighbourhood of the city in the evening of the day which followed your escape, and there I learnt the rumour of your complete acquittal before the Russian Judge."

During the few moments that Kyri Karaman was thus speaking, Tunar had revolved with lightning rapidity many ideas in his mind. Should he acquaint the two Guerillas with the motive of his presence in those Caucasian wilds?—should he invoke their aid in battling with the huge reptile which guarded the cavern-entrance into Gulistan? No!—for if he once admitted them into a share of his secret, they might slay him in order that there should be an individual the less to appropriate the treasures of the Vale of Roses. Besides, Tunar was intensely selfish, as all dastard minds invariably are; and he wished to retain for his own sole behoof as much of the valley's treasures as Danial, Leila, and Klodissa might have left behind them. His resolve was therefore speedily adopted:—he decided upon keeping his secret.

"Ah!" he said, in reply to Kyri Karaman's observations; "you learnt how my final release from custody and tribulation was effected? But you have yet to learn that I received a secret intimation from the Russian authorities in Tiflis, to the effect that the sooner I left the precincts of the city, the better

would it be for my own safety and security."

"Ah, indeed!—was it so?" ejaculated Kyri Karaman: and then he added with a scornful smile, "I am therefore to understand that your hypocritical pretext of entering the pale of the Russian church, did not win for you the confidence of the Russian authorities?"

"It would appear not," responded Tunar. "But you, gallant chief—for what purpose are you in this district of the Caucasus, where there are neither Russians to fight against in your capacity of Guerilla, nor wealthy travellers to waylay in your capacity of bandit?"

"We shall presently have leisure for conversation," replied Kyri Karaman. "Djemzet, my faithful follower, I pray thee relieve the steeds of their coparisons. Let them pasture at will; and do you exercise your skill as a marksman to provide us with the materials for a repast."

"On this latter score," interjected Tunar, "there need be neither trouble nor delay; for in a cave hard by I have the remnant of a fine buck, as well as wood to make a fire to cook it. I will forthwith set to work on your behalf——"

"Not so, Tunar," said Kyri Karaman, bending upon the youth a rapid significant look, as to imply he had a motive for wishing that they should be alone together. Let Djemzet perform an office to which he is far from unaccustomed."

Tunar accordingly gave Djemzet the requisite instructions with regard to the whereabouts of the cave,—which, though at only a short distance from the streamlet,

was nevertheless veiled from the eye by trees and shrubs. Djemzet proceeded towards the cave, the situation of which was thus pointed out to him; and the youth remained alone with Kyri Karaman. X

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CONVERSATION INTERRUPTED.

[T was already obvious to Tunar that Kyri Karaman wished to communicate with him thus alone, and that Djemzet had been purposely sent out of the way that there might be no witness to their discourse. The secret which the youth cherished in respect to the Vale of Gulistan operated upon him now with the same effect as if were a crime of which he was conscious and of which he was about to be accused. All his fears tended towards that point; and when Kyri Karaman threw himself upon the grass, and looked Tunar with penetrating earnestness in the face, the youth felt an inward terror, for he thought to hear nothing less than the words, "You have discovered the grand mystery!"

Infinite therefore was his relief when Kyri Karaman still gazing on him with his piercing black eyes, "Tell me, Tunar, all the particulars of the examination which took place before the Russian Judge."

"The whole transaction was most singular," exclaimed the youth, who willingly entered upon a subject so completely different from that which he had anticipated. "Perhaps you have heard of a lady named Klodissa? She came from Constantinople with the Princess Leila——"

"Yes, this much I have heard," interjected Kyri Karaman. "It was so rumoured in Tiflis. But proceed."

"This dusky-complexioned lady," continued Tunar, "came to me in the fortress on the day following my re-consignment thither—how she gained admittance I know not—and she at once informed me that she was acquainted with many mysteries. She mentioned your name and that of Djemzet in connection with the forcible abduction of the Princess from Mansour's house; and she moreover proclaimed her knowledge that it was Djemzet's hand which had dealt the merchant his death-blow."

"Ah! she said all this?" exclaimed Kyri Karaman. "What followed?"

"She asked me how it came to pass," continued Tunar, "that you should have lent yourself to the schemes of Mustapha Yakoub."

"And you told her the truth?" hastily interjected Karaman, fixing his dark eyes keenly upon Tunar, as if to discern whether his answer would be sincerely or falsely given.

"I thought there was no harm," rejoined the youth, "in mentioning to Klodissa—who, by the bye, assured me that she had a means of discovering whether I dealt candidly with her or not—"

"And of course you *did* deal candidly," exclaimed Kyri Karaman: "because you had your life to save, and she doubtless promised to save it?"

"In good sooth you have rightly conjectured," responded Tunar. "I told Klodissa how you had become impoverished—how Khazi had rebelled against you—and how

the slave-dealer's gold was requisite for your purposes——"

"Ah! and what said she," inquired Karaman, "when you told her all this?"

"She seemed astonished," replied Tunar; "she evidently heard it all for the first time. She then spoke to me of myself—she told me that there was hope—she made me pledge myself in terms the most solemn and sacred never again to concert the slightest mischief against the Princess Leila."

"And what next?" asked the Guerilla-bandit.

"Ah! then she again spoke of you," proceeded Tunar. "She bade me swear that I would never more ally myself in any way with you."

"Is this true, Tunar?" asked the Guerilla-bandit, whose dark eyes were fixed searchingly upon the youth: "or is it a pretext to rid yourself as soon as possible of my company?"

"By everything holy it is true!" cried Tunar, with all the emphasis which could possibly be derived from the confidence of one who was speaking with sincerity. "And the entire oath which she made me take in reference to yourself was a singular one. Her words are graven on my memory."

"Repeat them," said the Guerilla-bandit: and then he added, as if in a careless manner, "All these details are more or less interesting."

"Thus was it that Klodissa spoke," resumed Tunar: and he recited her words as follow: 'You will never again ally yourself in any way with Kyri Karaman: you will never henceforth hold the slightest intercourse with him,

either to lend yourself to his own designs or suggest schemes of evil unto him. Moreover you must swear that you will never avail yourself of such knowledge of his secrets to work him an injury, much less to betray him into the hands of justice for the sake of the reward which has been set upon his head.—These were the words which that strange mysterious woman dictated as an oath for me to take," added Tunar; "and I swear to you that I have spoken with sincerity!"

Kyri Karaman made no answer and no comment: but he reflected profoundly for some minutes. At length he said, again looking Tunar fixedly in the face, "Did you ever see this Klodissa before?—do you know who she is?"

"I never saw her before—at least not to my knowledge," replied Tunar. "As for knowing who she is, her name is Klodissa——"

"Well, well—we know that already!" ejaculated Kyri Karaman. "But what else took place betwixt you?"

"Ah! I forgot to mention," said Tunar, "that she enjoined me, as the condition of my safety when before the judge, not to breathe your name in connection with the carrying-off of the Princess Leila—but to proclaim Djemzet loudly and emphatically as Mansour's assassin, and to devise some fictitious name for the companion whom he had with him on the occasion. I strictly adhered to her instructions—I spoke of one Gregoras instead of Kyri Karaman——"

"Yes—rumour reports currently in Tiflis," interrupted the Guerilla-bandit, "that a reward has been offered for the discovery of

Djemzet and Gregoras—the former as the assassin of Mansour, the latter as his accomplice. But now tell me, Tunar—know you what has become of this dark-complexioned lady, Klodissa?"

"First let me inquire your motive for asking?" said Tunar.——"Because," he thought to himself, "if it be for a hostile purpose, I will put him on Klodissa's track on her way from the valley back to Tiflis, inasmuch as he will render me a service by clearing my path of that vindictive woman: but if it be for a friendly purpose, I will tell him nothing, for fear lest she should speak evil of me to him; and no man in his senses would willingly have Kyri Karaman for an enemy!"

Such were the reflections which Tunar was silently revolving in his mind.

"You inquire my motive for putting the question," said the Guerilla-bandit; "and you are right in so doing. You in a measure owe your life and liberty to this Klodissa of whom we are speaking; and it is but suitable and becoming that you should be grateful. Speak therefore in all frankness: for I swear to you that I would not harm a single hair of her head!"

"Believe me," replied Tunar, "I know nothing of the lady Klodissa's movements—I am ignorant of what has become of her—but I should surmise that she is still at Tiflis."

"Then if you could give me no information on the point," said Kyri Karaman, eyeing Tunar suspiciously, "why did you question me relative to my motives in asking?"

"Because," responded the youth boldly, for he saw that some suspi-

cion was excited, and he was anxious to avert it,—“because, as you have conjectured, I feel deeply grateful to Klodissa—and I trembled lest for some reason or another she might have an enemy in Kyri Karaman!”

The Guerilla-bandit was evidently satisfied with the answer; and it was with no lingering suspicion that he said, “How is it possible I could be her enemy? Did she not labour to screen my name from oidum at the same time that she took measures to save your life and insure your liberty?”

“I am well pleased to hear you speak thus,” responded Tunar. “But pardon me for saying that the ways of Kyri Karaman are sometimes so inscrutable that he may entertain hostility where one would think friendship was more natural.”

“Yet towards this Klodissa,” said the Guerilla-bandit. “I entertain naught but the most grateful feelings. But enough upon this point! You have pledged yourself, Tunar, to that lady that you will henceforth hold no farther intercourse with me: and it is not my purpose to induce you to break your oath. Were it otherwise—and had you not thus sworn—I should make you certain propositions. In short, I should suggest that you enter into my service.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Tunar: “then you are again in a fair way to form a gallant band——”

“At a distance of three leagues beyond those hills,” interrupted Kyri Karaman, now speaking with all that dignity of a chieftain which he had been wont to adopt when Tunar first made his acquaintance, “there is a troop of twelve brave

fellows who call me their leader.” “I congratulate you brave captain!” exclaimed Tunar. “But you perceive that it is impossible for me to join you. I am sacredly bound to concert no evil designs with Kyri Karaman.”

“And I,” responded the Guerilla, “shall not seek to turn you from your oath.”

“Might I venture to ask,” said Tunar, whose manner had grown somewhat less independent and more deferential since he had learnt that Kyri Karaman was again a person exercising the authority of a leader, “for what object you have penetrated with a single follower amidst these wilds?”

“You know,” answered the Guerilla-bandit, his large lustrous eyes flashing fire, “that I have some scores to settle with the perfidious Khazi—that rebel lieutenant of mine——”

“I know it,” said Tunar: “and now that you are again at the head of a band, I should not like to be Khazi. I presume, therefore, that you are upon his track?”

“Listen!” resumed Kyri Karaman; “for there is no violation of your oath in hearing my intentions, provided that you succour them not. The twelve brave men whom I have left yonder, are deserters from Khazi’s banner; and they have given back their allegiance to their former chief. They have manifested the utmost contrition for their conduct towards me: they have assured me that they were led astray by the false and specious representations of the rebel Khazi. I have therefore forgiven them; and they are again heart and soul in my cause. We have acquired the certitude

that others of Khazi's band have been slain in a recent unsuccessful encounter with some Russians; and we are further instructed that Khazi himself, with only a single follower, has sought refuge in the wildest regions of the Caucasus. He dreads the vengeance of Kyri Karaman," added the chief proudly, "more than the pursuit of the Russians. I and my band are beating these wilds in search of the fugitives; and while my brave fellows are resting yonder, I set out with Djemzet to explore the region in this direction. You are now acquainted, Tunar, with the cause of my presence in this place: but you yourself have yet to tell me how it is that I find you a solitary wanderer in such a district; for even if expelled from Tiflis, surely there were other quarters of the world a trifle more desirable than the loneliest portions of the Caucasus? Ah! perhaps," added Kyri Karaman, with an ironical smile, "you are hunting after that mountain-girt paradise——"

The deep blush which suddenly overspread Tunar's countenance would assuredly have excited some suspicion in the mind of Kyri Karaman had not the latter at the moment been startled to his feet by an appearance which elicited an ejaculation from his lips. This was the irruption of some dozen armed men from amidst the adjacent rocks into the little open space through which flowed the streamlet on whose bank the colloquy was being carried on. Tunar likewise sprang up to his feet; and Djemzet at the same moment issued from the cave at a short distance. One of the armed men who had so abruptly made their appearance

rushed towards Djemzet; but the latter, seizing a pistol from his belt, shot his assailant dead upon the spot.

"By heaven this is serious!" ejaculated Kyri Karaman.

All that he next did was the work of but a few moments. The saddles and bridles so recently taken from his own and Djemzet's horses were lying close by upon the ground: the Guerilla-bandit called to the two steeds, which instantly recognised his voice and obeyed it. In the twinkling of an eye they were upon the spot.

"Caparison one of them!" ejaculated Karaman, thus speaking to Tunar.

The youth, having lost his own self-possession, was startled into a vivid readiness to follow a mandate emanating from the presence of mind of another. To saddle and bridle the steed that was nearest to him was the work of a few moments: while Kyri Karaman did the same by the other horse. Tunar's own animal was feeding quietly at a little distance; and in the meanwhile several shots were fired by the armed strangers towards the spot where this scene was taking place: but both the Guerilla-bandit and Tunar, as well as the horses that had just been caparisoned were protected by a clump of trees from the whistling bullets.

It was at a distance of nearly two hundred yards that the armed strangers had first appeared; and they were now rushing towards the spot where Karaman and Tunar had just saddled and bridled the horses. Djemzet, having killed his assailant, was likewise speeding thitherward; and it was a

marvel that he escaped the shots which were sent after him.

"Quick, quick, Djemzet!" exclaimed Kyri Karaman, as he sprang upon his own steed.

Tunar—thinking that the other had been intended for himself when he was so promptly ordered to comparison it—was about to leap on its back: but at that instant Djemzet appeared upon the spot. With his right hand swinging Tunar forcibly away, Djemzet just touched the saddle-bow with his left hand; and the next instant he was on the animal's back. Another moment, and both the Guerillas were galloping away as if borne on the wings of a whirlwind.

Half-a-dozen shots were fired after them; and the armed strangers were for a few instants enveloped in the smoke produced by their own rifles. Tunar stood utterly bewildered—riveted to the spot—until in a few seconds four or five of the men, bursting as it were from amidst the smoke, seized upon him as their prisoner.

CHAPTER XL.

THE ARMED PARTY.

KYRI KARAMAN and Djemzet succeeded in effecting their escape without sustaining the slightest injury from the bullets which were sent whistling after them. Tunar was now a prisoner in the hands of the men who had made this irruption upon the place. At first the youth thought that these individuals might belong to Khazi's band, the strength of which might have been misrepresented to Kyri Karaman; but when he ob-

tained a nearer view of them his opinion altered—for their apparel was not that which was generally worn by the Georgian Guerillas of the Caucasus. The whole scene had taken place with so much rapidity that Tunar was as much bewildered as frightened; and on being so rudely seized upon, he could not so much as give utterance to a word of remonstrance.

The men appeared to be considerably chagrined that Kyri Karaman, whose name they mentioned amongst themselves, should have escaped them; and from what they said it became evident to Tunar that the Guerilla bandit was the main object of their sudden incursion upon the spot.

"I have no connection with Kyri Karaman!" exclaimed Tunar, now recovering the faculty of speech, as he thought that he perceived a chance of liberating himself from the clutches of the armed strangers.

"This is a pretty tale to tell us," replied one who by his superior costume and his air of authority appeared to be the leader of the little band, "when we found you in most friendly companionship with that detestable brigand."

"Yet I swear to you," said Tunar, "that I had not been an hour in that companionship! I was by myself amidst these wilds, when Kyri Karaman and his dependant suddenly made their appearance—"

"And for what purpose were you by yourself in these wilds?" demanded the leader of the party.

Tunar would not for worlds reveal the secret in respect to Gulistan—or rather, we should say, in respect to as much as he

knew of it. He was therefore seized with confusion, and a blush overspread his cheeks, as he cast about in his own mind for some pretext that might serve as a satisfactory answer to the question just put to him."

"You reply not," said the leader of the band; "and it is no wonder!—for though it may be perfectly true that you had been for awhile alone in this region, yet it is only too clear that you are an accomplice of that formidable bandit. Therefore you best know for what purpose you were alone upon the spot until he and his other follower came hither to join you."

"Hear me, I beseech!" exclaimed Tunar, who was labouring under a mortal dread lest he might have fallen into the hands of persons having alike the authority and the intention to punish whomsoever they might suspect of belonging to the band of Kyri Karaman. "It is true that I had some particular motive for flying into this seclusion—I am weary of living in cities and towns—but so far from having any connection with the Guerilla-bandit, I knew not that it was he until I just now heard some of you mention his dreadful name."

"Your tale is falsified by your recent actions," sternly responded the leader of the party. "Did you not, immediately on our appearance, begin to saddle and bridle one of the steeds?—would you not have fled if it had been in your power?—were you not on the very point of mounting your horse when you were thrust aside by the brigand who issued from the little cave and who has killed one of my men?"

"You and your followers appeared in such a sort," answered Tunar, "that I might be well excused if I took you for Guerilla enemies or for banditti. Hence was I about to obey a sudden impulse and save myself by flight. But it was not my own steed which I caparisoned. Yonder is my horse—and the saddle and bridle which belongs to the animal will be found in that cave. Oh, I am a peaceable youth—I swear unto you! Unhand me and molest me not!"

"The whole tale has its discrepancies and inconsistencies," said the leader of the party; "and I do not think fit to pronounce judgment upon your case. *That* must be reserved for another, who exercises an authority far higher than mine, and in comparison to whom I am but as dust under our feet. So enough of parley! And now let us away!"

This last ejaculation was addressed by the leader to his men rather than to Tunar. The youth saw that it was utterly unavailing to prolong the discussion with that individual; but he hoped to obtain his release at the hands of the higher authority to whom allusion had been made:—yet much did he marvel who the exalted personage could possibly be.

One of the men proceeded to the cave, where he found the saddle and bridle; and then he hastened to caparison Tunar's steed. The youth was suffered to mount; and the animal was led in the midst of the armed men, the party proceeding away from the spot where the adventure had taken place. Farther into the midst of the Caucasian wilds did they advance,—each step increasing the

distance from that towering circle of inaccessible mountains which hemmed in the Vale of Gulistan. For about half-an-hour they thus proceeded; and at the expiration of that time they entered upon a beautiful spot, where a dozen horses were feeding upon the rich grass. Splendid animals were they, of the finest Caucasian breed; and a couple of men apparelled and armed in a style similar to those who had Tunar in their custody, had evidently been left in care of the horses.

There was now a general saddling and bridling of the steeds; but a very few moments were thus occupied; and then the whole party set forward in a northern direction. The circular range of mountains enclosing the Vale of Roses was left at some little distance on the right hand—that is to say, in an eastern direction; and Tunar heaved a profound sigh as he turned his looks thitherward. At the very moment when he was indulging in bright hopes and golden visions, had misfortune intervened to snatch him away from the vicinity of that paradise to which he possessed (as he believed) an almost complete clue; and for a while the desponding thought that he was doomed never to enter that blessed valley took possession of his mind.

“And yet why should I thus abandon myself to despair?” at length said Tunar within his own mind. “Am I not to be conducted into the presence of some high personage?—and may I not to him make such representations as will ensure my freedom? Then may I retrace my way to the neighbourhood of that mountain-

girt paradise, into whose blessed retreats I shall finally enter. Oh! how could I expect that the path to such a paradise of joys would be smooth and even? I ought to have been prepared to find it perilous with vicissitudes and threatening incidents. Its happiness will be all the sweeter when attained after having passed through the entire ordeal. Ah! but to know that neighbourhood again—to be enabled to recognise it!—for I must not trust to the sagacity of this steed which is now threading pathways as utterly unknown to itself as they are to me! Besides, my good horse may be taken from me: for how know I into whose hands I have fallen? how can I even conjecture what may be the avocation of these armed strangers who have me in their power? No!—and I cannot even surmise to what distance they purpose to conduct me, nor how many weary leagues I may have to journey when retracing my way after having been presented to their chief, at whose hands I have yet to implore my liberty.”

It was in such a strain as this that Tunar reflected within himself—it was in this channel that his thoughts flowed while riding onward at moderate pace a prisoner in the midst of those armed men. That pace was moderate because the route was uneven and rugged, and frequently perilous when it lay along the verge of deep yawning abysses in the depths of which thundered the torrents, of whose foaming waters glimpses were caught by the eye when it dared to look down into the horrid profundities. Tunar bore in mind the necessity of

affixing to his memory certain indications by which he might on a future occasion recognise the mountains hemming in the Vale of Gulistan. Therefore, when the circumstances of the route permitted him to direct his attention for a little while from the guidance of his steed, he fixed his gaze on those mountains. His look wandered slowly along the range of their jagged and uneven summits,—until his regards settled upon the loftiest eminence of the whole; and this was the height which appeared to have been split in twain for some distance down, as if a colossal peak had been riven into two towering pinnacles.

“By that mountain shall I know the neighbourhood again!” said Tunar within himself: and he was rejoiced at the discovery of so unerring a landmark.

But though he endeavoured to persuade himself that when brought into the presence of the high personage to whom allusion had been made, his restoration to liberty would speedily follow, he was far from being altogether comfortable upon the point. He could scarcely think that he was in the hands of banditti; because if such were their character it was improbable that they would have shown such decided hostility towards Kyri Karaman: for the proverb as well as the principle that “dog does not eat dog” holds good amongst the mountaineers of the Caucasus as well as with other races and nations in the world. But if they were *not* banditti, were they simply Guerillas, sworn to deadly hostility against the Russians, as many of those mountain tribes were?—and did this

little party form but a small detached section of a larger force, commanded by a chieftain of rank? Tunar thought that such must be the case; and he wondered to what distance the journey would extend ere all doubts should be cleared up and his fate should be decided upon.

That journey was continued amidst the wilds of the Caucasus: the sun sank lower and lower towards the hills in the West; and at length its last beams flickered above those heights in the horizon. Still the way was pursued; and Tunar dared not ask a question for the purpose of ascertaining whether the destination of the party was as yet nigh at hand. Presently a halt was ordered by the leader: they all dismounted from their steeds, and provisions were served round. In this respect the youth was as well cared for as the rest; but a vigilant eye was kept over him to prevent any endeavour to escape.

After a suitable rest the journey was resumed; for the moon and stars now lighted the pathway of the travellers through the wilds of the Caucasus. For hours did they proceed; then there was another halt, and then the journey was continued. The morning dawned—the sun rose—and at a streamlet where there was again a halt did the travellers perform their ablutions. Farther and still farther was Tunar then conducted onward, until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when on emerging from a defile, a wide open space amidst the mountains was reached. This open space might be about three miles in circumference, and therefore a mile in diameter. It was surrounded by the hills of the Caucasus; and

on the farther side from that by which Tunar and his conductors had entered upon it, there was a fortalice constituting as it were the crest of the mountain. The edifice stood frowning there in gloomy massiveness,—the very configuration of its walls and towers affording the evidences of great strength, while its aspect shed upon the mind of Tunar the dispiriting impression of a prison.

Scarcely had the youth and his conductors entered upon this open space surrounded by hills and overlooked by that frowning fortalice, when another party of horsemen was seen slowly riding across the plain, as if coming from the direction of the castle itself. This party consisted only of five or six persons, one of whom rode a little in advance of the rest, as if he were a chieftan followed by his attendants. His person appeared to shine in the sunbeams as if he were clad in armour. There was something singularly imposing and even awe-inspiring in the advance of that individual; and Tunar instinctively as it were thought within himself, "This personage who comes as though enveloped in a halo of glory, must doubtless be the great chief by whom my fate is to be decided!"

Now therefore the youth trembled to the uttermost confines of his being; for he felt as if he were about to appear in the presence of some high authority—some awful personage whose very breath was laden with the fates of destiny. And as Tunar glanced around upon the men who had him in their custody, he perceived that their countenances indicated the deepest veneration and respect as

they advanced towards this chief who was likewise approaching. As the two parties drew near towards each other, Tunar soon perceived that his original was correct, and that the chief was clad in armour. A little nearer, and he could form an idea of the personal characteristics of this individual, who might be about fifty-five years of age, and though but little above the medium stature, yet appearing much taller on account of the dignity of his deportment and the upright manner in which he sat upon the splendid steed that he bestrode. The complexion of this personage was fair and somewhat florid; from beneath his glittering helmet his light hair escaped: it was originally of a reddish hue, but it was turning grey. His eyes, of an azure blue—or perhaps, to speak more correctly of that colour which is termed grey when applied to the human eye—had an expression alike commanding and penetrating. In a word, the whole aspect of this individual was majestic and imposing.

Suspicious and surmises were now gushing through the mind of Tunar. In Tiflis he had seen pictures of a personage whose name and exploits were known throughout the world; and the youth began to fancy the original of these portraits must now be before him. Yes, it could not be otherwise! That fair complexion—that calm imposing dignity—that warlike panoply—the reverential aspect with which the personage was surveyed,—all circumstances combined to convince Tunar that he was now in the presence of none other than Schanyl, the Prince of Daghestan!

When the two parties were within about a hundred yards of one another, the leader of that party to which Tunar belonged gave a word of command; and every right hand was carried in respectful salutation to every cap. The youth mechanically followed their example; and the salutation of the entire party was acknowledged by a dignified yet gracious inclination of the head of the steel-clad chief.

"Advance into the presence of our Prince," said the leader to Tunar; "for now must you tell your tale to the illustrious Sultan Schamyl, whom you behold before you!"

Thus Tunar's surmise was correct!—and his fate was about to be decided by that eminent personage who was alike the Hero and the Prophet of the Caucasus! The leader of the party and two or three of his men (the others now halting at a respectful distance) conducted Tunar forward; and again were deferential salutations paid to the Sultan Schamyl.

"Welcome, my good Hamet," said the great warrior, thus addressing the leader of the returning party. "Whom do you bring hither? He is a comely youth! Does he seek service with us?—or has been captured as a spy or a bandit?"

"May it please your Highness," responded Hamet, "this youth is a prisoner; and he has been captured in such circumstances which well warrant the opinion that he is a bandit. But he has a tale to tell; and the sagacity of your Highness will full soon fathom its truth or falsity."

"Ah! a bandit—and so young?"

exclaimed Schamyl, an expression of mingled sternness and regret passing over his countenance: "it were a pity that this should be so! But do you speak first, Hamet—and tell me under what circumstances this youth has fallen into your hands?"

"May it please your Highness," resumed Hamet, "I departed some ten days back with a picked body of men, to explore those particular regions where, according to the rumour that had reached your Highness, a strong Russian force was supposed to have concentrated itself. For several days we beat about those regions—sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot—but without discovering the slightest trace of the Muscovite enemy. Indeed, from the inquiries which we made at two or three villages in the vicinity of those regions, I could come to no other conclusion than that your Highness had been misinformed."

"It would appear so, Hamet, from all you have just been telling me," remarked Schamyl. "But proceed."

"Yesterday afternoon, may it please your Highness," continued Hamet, "we halted at a suitable spot while on our journey back to Garanrog:"—and the subaltern as he spoke glanced towards the castle on the summit of the hill at a little distance, so that Tunar comprehended that this was the name of the fortress. "According to my invariable precaution," continued Hamet, "I acted as if I had arrived at no positive opinion from the information received in the villages: but I set out with the greater portion of my men to explore the district in the neighbourhood of

the halting-place. I thought that we could not better employ an hour or two while our steeds rested."

"Ever active and intelligent, my faithful Hamet!" said Schamyl approvingly. "Continue."

"As I was informing your Highness," resumed the subaltern, "I set out with the greater number of my men: but we beheld not the slightest indication of any Russian troops in that region. We were thinking of returning to the place where we had left our steeds in the care of two or three of our party, when we were accosted by a man in a very sorry plight. He was a fine specimen of the Georgian race—tall, well-formed, and, no doubt of great strength: but his garments were in rags—he looked half famished—and his eyes had a portentous glare as if he were horribly vindictive against some persons who had wrought him an injury. This man anxiously inquired who we were?—but I at first spoke cautiously, for fear lest he might be a Russian spy and should lead us into some snare. I, however, soon discovered that he had a bitter animosity against the Russians, at whose hands he had recently suffered a defeat, so that the brave Guerillas whom he had commanded perished in the conflict. Previous to this calamity his little band had been diminished by the desertion of some dozen of his bravest followers: and thus he was reduced to the condition of a wretched wanderer in those wilds."

"Ah!" thought Tunar to himself, "this must have been Kbazi!"

"Commiserating the unfortunate man," continued Hamet, "I prof-

ferred him food. I told him that we were soldiers in the service of your Highness, and that from information your Highness had received, you had penetrated with a considerable force into the wilds of the Caucasus with the hope of falling in with the Russians, whose movements my scouting party had been sent out to track. The man in reply assured me that your Highness must have been misled, and that there was really no Russian force of any magnitude whatsoever within many, many leagues of these regions of the Caucasus,—none of the Muscovite enemy indeed beyond a few small detached parties, such as the one with which his own band had come in contact and by which he had been worsted. But there was another enemy in that neighbourhood——"

"Ah! another?" ejaculated Schamyl.

"Yes my lord," replied Hamet,—"an enemy on whose head a reward has been set not merely by the Russians, but likewise by the native authorities of Georgia, and by the Government of your Highness."

"By Allah!" exclaimed Schamyl, "your words can bear reference to none other than Kyri Karaman?"

"The same, my lord," rejoined Hamet. "And he at that very time was in the neighbourhood of the spot where we met that outcast man—that wandering Guerilla chief. He had seen Kyri Karaman with two other persons; and he implored me to lose not a moment in hastening to the capture of that bold outlaw. Need I say, my lord, that I was only too wil-

ling to follow the suggestion? But that man chose not to accompany me—he may have had his reasons—indeed I have subsequently suspected that he may have belonged to Karaman's vile horde, and may have entertained a rebellious spite against his chief."

"And most true was your suspicion!" thought Tunar within himself.

"However, be all this as it may," continued Hamet, "the man would take no active part in the proceeding. He contended himself with simply conducting my hand to the immediate vicinity of the spot where he had seen Kyri Karaman reposing on the bank of a streamlet. Perhaps he may have dreaded that if we captured the formidable Guerilla-bandit, the latter would at once denounce him likewise as a lawless person, and that he himself therefore would be held a prisoner by us. It must have been something of this kind; for the fellow looked not a coward, and moreover our party was so numerous! However, certain it is that the instant he had conducted us to the close vicinage of the spot where Kyri Karaman was to be found, he fled precipitately and disappeared from our view amidst the wild scenery of those regions. And now, my lord," continued Hamet, in a subdued voice and with something like a look of humiliation, "I am disagreeably compelled to inform your Highness that the enterprise failed."

"Failed?" said Schamyl sternly. "And you so numerous in comparison with the others!"

"Alas, my lord, it failed!" repeated Hamet, with a contrite air. "That Kyri Karaman seems

to bear a charmed life; the bullets whistled around him, but not a hair of his head was injured. Finally, my lord, he escaped with one of his companions. And here is the other!" added Hamet, turning towards Tunar.

"I know you too well, my faithful dependant," said Schamyl, now speaking in a benevolent manner, "not to be fully aware that there must have been circumstances militating strongly against your success. We will therefore only deplore that the villain Kyri Karaman should have escaped: for, by Allah! if he had fallen into our hands he should have swung to a gibbet on the highest tower of Garanrog! And so, Hamet," continued the Sultan Schamyl, "we have been misinformed in reference to the concentration of Russian forces—and for no useful purpose have I brought my brave troops into these districts?"

"Yes, sire—you have been misinformed," answered Hamet.

"And you, young man," said Schamyl, now bending his grey eyes with cold sternness upon Tunar,—“you, an almost beardless youth, to be the companion and accomplice of Kyri Karaman——”

"My lord," interrupted Tunar, "may it please your Highness to hear me! Accident rendered me Kyri Karaman's companion for an hour yesterday afternoon, as it might have thrown me in the way of any other traveller of whose name and avocation I was utterly ignorant. In this sense I was truly his companion for an hour—but never was I his accomplice! I knew not who the man was until after I was taken into custody by the soldiers of your Highness; and

then I heard his name mentioned amongst them."

"How true is all this, Hamet?" inquired Schamyl, now turning to his subaltern.

"So little faith did I repose in the youth's story," responded Hamet, "that I brought him hither to be dealt with according to the pleasure of your Highness. No good account did he give of himself—no credible reason did he assign for his presence in those wilds: while, on the other hand, prompt was he in doing all that a follower and a partisan of the bandit-captain might be expected to do in the circumstances of a sudden surprise. It was not his fault if he did not escape on the steed of Karaman's other adherent, as if under the impulse of conscious guilt."

"It is but too clear," exclaimed Schamyl; "this youth is the criminal partisan of the vile bandit!"

"Great Prince!" cried Tunar, in agony and anguish of mind, "I swear unto your Highness——"

"Silence!" thundered Schamyl, with so commanding a look and gesture that Tunar was overawed in a moment. "You have merited death, but for the greenness of your years will I spare your life! Eternal imprisonment shall be your doom. Away with him, Hamet! and since he is fond of the companionship of the vile and worthless, let him keep company with the wretched Frank spy Dorva!"

Having thus spoken, the Sultan Schamyl suddenly wheeled his horse and galloped away in the direction of some hills on the slopes which countless tents were agitated. A piercing sup-

plication for mercy rang forth from the lips of the wretched Tunar: but Schamyl heeded not that plaintive cry; and Hamet said in a stern tone, "It is useless. Your doom is sealed."

The miserable Tunar did indeed perceive that all entreaty, remonstrance, or prayer would prove unavailing; and he sank into a despondency as sudden as it was profound. Hamet and his followers conducted the youth towards the eminence on the top of which stood the Castle of Garanrog. The reins had dropped from Tunar's hand; he sat upon his steed without being conscious that he was on the animal's back at all: the condition of his mind was as if he were labouring under the stunning, overwhelming stupefying effect of some tremendous consternation. In this manner—listless, apathetic, almost unconscious—did Tunar proceed for a few minutes, until he was suddenly startled into a keen sense of his hopeless, terrible position, by being ordered to dismount. He glanced wildly around, and then at once obeyed the mandate.

The spot where he and his guards had thus halted, was at the foot of a narrow ascent of steps cut out of the solid rock—so narrow indeed that two persons could not proceed abreast. On both sides the walls of rock rose up perpendicularly to a height of about thirty feet above the range of steps themselves. The ascent moreover took a winding direction; and as this was the only mode of obtaining access to the castle standing on the summit of the hill, the position might be deemed impregnable.

Hamet led the way—Tunar

followed—and a couple of soldiers brought up the rear. The ascent was continued for an immense height; and when the steps ceased, a straight narrow passage, likewise cut out of the solid rock, revealed itself. At the end of this passage a huge cannon presented its muzzle in a point-blank direction. Thus even supposing that enemies might succeed in ascending the steps, it would be utterly impossible for them to force this passage, commanded as it was by the sweeping fire of that piece of ordnance.

The passage was threaded; and now Tunar found himself in what might be termed the courtyard of the castle. It was a complete square, about a hundred yards in width, and with a round tower at each angle. Instead of artificial walls to connect those flanking towers, the rock itself was so cut on the four sides as to form natural ramparts, in which embrasures were formed for the service of heavy cannon, which might sweep the plain in front or all the hills in the vicinity of the other three sides.

Within this courtyard were ranges of buildings formed in the shape of a hallow square, and running parallel with the granite ramparts. Indeed, we may better describe these arrangements by the illustration of a smaller square within a larger one. In the midst of the courtyard of the inner square stood a tall massive tower, the parapets of which overhung the shaft of the edifice; so that if a stone were dropped straight down over the parapet, it would fall at the distance of a yard from the actual base of the tower. On this lofty structure there was a flagstaff:

and an immense silken banner was waving in honour of the Sultan Schamyl's presence in that neighbourhood.

Tunar beheld three or four sentinels pacing to and fro in different parts of the fortalice; while some twenty or thirty soldiers off duty were engaged in burnishing their weapons, or else in the more recreative employment of smoking their pipes. They all bestowed a respectful salutation upon Hamet as he passed: and they seemed to comprehend by their looks that Tunar had been brought thither as a captive.

The wretched youth was conducted through a guard-house in one of the lines of building, and thence to a low deep-set massive door opening into the tower. There a gaoler who had by this time joined the little party, produced the key which opened that portal. A spiral ascent of stone steps was now revealed; and the gaoler led the way. Several loopholes were passed during the winding ascent: and presently the gaoler paused for a moment to open another massive door which seemed to bar farther progress. When it was opened, the gaoler stood aside—Hamet commanded Tunar to advance—and as the youth obeyed, passing through that ominous portal, the massive door closed behind him with a din that seemed to be the knell of hope and the tocsin of despair.

CHAPTER XL

GARANROG CAST

TUNAR found himself, on a small landing, led by a loophole only just enough at

the extremity for a man to pass his arm through it: and its depth showed the immense thickness of the wall. In front of Tunar was a closed door, with a massive iron ring serving as a handle for the latch: on his left hand was a continuation of the ascent of stone steps: The huge key had turned in the lock of the door behind him—the closing of the ponderous bolts had likewise struck with a sinister din upon his ear. He felt as if he were entombed alive in a sepulchre!

Without thinking which way he was to proceed—whether it were meant that he should open the door in front of him or ascend the stone stairs on his left hand—he leant against the wall and gave way to the violence of his affliction. He sobbed and wept bitterly; his tears almost blinded him—so that he did not immediately perceive that the door was opening until he became aware that he was no longer alone.

A strange-looking man stood before him upon the threshold of that door which had just opened. This individual appeared to be about sixty years of age: his long grey hair was put back from his high, open, massive forehead, the expansiveness of which was increased by the baldness of the front portion of the crown. A long grey beard, seeming to be the growth of years, concealed all the lower part of the countenance; and as the hair came high upon the man's face, almost to the cheek-bones,—moreover, as the brows were long, thick, and shaggy,—the eyes themselves appeared to glisten forth from amidst a hairy mass, as if they were the eyes of some wild

animal. The hair and beard had a ragged and matted aspect; and the whole appearance of the man was that of wretchedness, slovenliness, and self-neglect combined. He was of about middle height; and so attenuated was his form that his clothes hung upon him as if they were garments of a much stouter person which had been bestowed in charity upon their present wearer. Indeed, Tunar could not conceive at the mement that they were veritably his own garments—those which he had worn on the day when he was first consigned as a prisoner to that tower! The costume was that of an individual belonging to some nation of Western Europe: it consisted of broad-cloth: it was threadbare, covered with a thousand grease spots—worn and torn even to raggedness in many parts. Although this individual's appearance at once denoted the captive:—he seemed to be the very personification of the sufferings, the gloom, the neglect, and the squalor of a dungeon!

He did not immediately speak, but contemplated Tunar with mingled surprise, interest, and mistrust—while the youth gazed upon him with harrowed feelings, for he thought that in this individual he beheld an illustration and a prototype of the wretched pitiable condition to which he himself should in due time be reduced by all the terrific influences of captivity. But suddenly a recollection flashed to Tunar's mind: he remembered what the Sultan Schamyl had said in reference to a French spy named Dorval, and to whose companionship he was to be consigned. He had therefore no doubt

that he beheld before him the individual to whom allusion had thus been made—the person whose companion in captivity he was to be!

"I need not ask, unfortunate boy," said the old man, at length breaking silence, "whether you are a prisoner? The mode in which you have been thrust in upon this landing—those tears and those sobs—all tell the tale but too intelligibly!"

"Alas! it is so!" responded Tunar: and then he again gave way to a wild paroxysm of anguish.

The old man had addressed him in the usual language of the Caucasian tribes: he spoke that language with fluency, though with accent which indicated the foreigner. His voice sounded somewhat hollow and sepulchral, as if it had borrowed an intonation from the gloomy, sombre, and cavern-like echoes which were raised in the tower by every passing sound. The aged prisoner suffered Tunar to abandon himself for a few minutes without interruption to his grief; for he perhaps thought that the youth's mind would be relieved when it should have obtained this vent. At length he said, "It is natural, unhappy boy, that you should deplore your fate: but still, as a fellow-creature, I may remind you that whole oceans of tears flowing from those eyes will neither soften the mortar of these walls nor the hearts of your gaolers!"

"It is but too true!" ejaculated Tunar, with a desperate effort to call his fortitude to his aid.

"Enter into the place which is henceforth to be your home," said the old man. "You come to break

in upon a solitude which I have experienced for five years!"

Tunar followed his aged companion into the large gloomy apartment with which the door communicated. Though high up in that tower, it had in its massiveness all the appearance of a subterranean dungeon. There was a huge stone pillar sustaining the roof; and against the base of this pillar was a large stone bench to serve as a seat or a bed. Light and air penetrated through a window high up in the wall, and the deep setting of which showed, as well as the loopholes elsewhere, the tremendous thickness of the masonry. Tunar glanced around, expecting to behold straw scattered on the pavement-floor to serve as the only bed which his form should press at night: but he beheld nothing of the sort—and he was even surprised to remark that the place had a certain air of cleanliness, so far as a surface of masonry, on every side, as well as above and below, could possibly wear such an aspect.

"First of all," said the old prisoner, "before we exchange a single syllable of personal explanations, let me show you and tell you what treatment you will have to expect in this place; I presume that your position will be rendered perfectly similar to mine. That stone bench against the pillar will serve as your bedstead. Look! mine is a similar stone bench, against yonder wall. You can distinguish it but dimly; for by the way in which the light now penetrates, it is in the obscurest nook of the apartment. You will have a straw mattress and blankets given you; and when these get old and worn out

new ones will be supplied. Twice every day your meals will be brought in; and these you will find to be neither stinted nor unwholesome. Rice for your breakfast, with the addition of a slice of coarse bread, and occasionally a wheaten cake. For dinner, rice and milk—or else a thick soup, with vegetables and brown bread—or else seethed or roasted goat's flesh. Sometimes fruits are superadded; and once a week there is a small supply of ardent spirits allowed. So much for the routine of the ration department; for it must be injustice conceded to Schamyl and his subordinates that though they punish they do not torture."

"But my punishment is most unjust!" exclaimed Tunar passionately.

"And mine likewise," said the old man, but in so quiet a way that it contrasted singularly with the vehement utterance of the youth. "However, on these topics we will converse anon; for we shall have plenty of time for conversation—and even though we had ten thousand subjects of interest to discuss, we should in time exhaust them all within the walls of Garanrog."

"You have told me," said Tunar, perceiving the utter inutility of exciting himself, and already impressed by the example of his companion's coolness and self-possession,—“you have told me what I am to expect in reference to personal wants:—be pleased to inform me whether there is no chance of being allowed to breathe a fresher atmosphere than that which penetrates through yonder window?"

"As for the freshness of the

atmosphere," answered the old prisoner, "it could not possibly be purer even though you never tasted it otherwise than through that window. For, as you must have observed, Garanrog stands upon a height, and this tower holds its position in the freshest *stratum* of air which breathes over the whole range of the Caucasus. Yet may you have other exercise, if you will, than that which a mere pacing to and fro in this apartment would afford. There is a flight of steps just outside our door, which leads up to the summit of the edifice; and there you may walk at will by day or by night."

"Then are not the precautions of the gaolers very carefully studied?" demanded Tunar, eagerly clutching at the hope of escape.

"What precaution need they take," asked the old man, "beyond locking and bolting that massive door which has so recently closed behind you upon the landing? To escape from this tower you must *descend* instead of *ascending*—unless indeed," he added in a peculiar tone, "you possess the wings of Icarus to bear you away in bird-like soaring from the summit."

"Then escape is impossible?" said Tunar, in a voice of the deepest despondency.

"Judge for yourself," rejoined the old man, "after I shall have mentioned a few particulars. The massive door upon the landing is never left unlocked or unbolted, save and except for the few moments of the gaoler's visit twice every day to bring the meals. What if you were to kill the gaoler during one of these visits? Half way down the staircase you would be encountered by his assistant

who has accompanied him thus far that assistant is armed with loaded pistols—and he would at once blow out your brains. But let us even suppose that you slay this assistant likewise—or that by some accident he has failed to follow his superior on this particular occasion. Well then, you reach the door at the base of the tower, and there you find yourself confronted by a sentinel!”

“And if *he* likewise were slain?” asked Tunar, again clutching at a wild hope; for desperate men will perform desperate deeds, and their very desperation inspires them with a tremendous energy?”

“Good,” said the grey-bearded prisoner, treating the whole matter with a business-like patience and coolness; “we will suppose that you kill the sentinel. But this is not done without noise; and the guard-house is close at hand to vomit forth a dozen other armed soldiers.”

“But what if it should happen to be done without noise?” ejaculated Tunar eagerly.

“Then you find yourself within the inner square, formed by the four ranges of buildings. Thence there is but one mode of egress, and this is through the guard-house itself. You passed that way just now when you were brought hither.”

“But what if I scale those buildings?” exclaimed Tunar.

“In order to do this you would have to discover some point unprotected by a sentinel,” rejoined the old man; “and no such point could you find. But even if you *did*, let us go so far as to suppose that you scale those buildings and get into the outer courtyard:—

what then are your modes of escape? To climb over the rampart and be dashed to pieces on the craggy rocks below? or else to make a rush to the passage leading to the flight of steps that winds down into the plain? Well, but is there not a cannon commanding the mouth of that passage? is it not ever loaded? and are there not two sentinels stationed there day and night? Ah, young man! for five years have I been an inmate of this place; and think you that in the earliest period of my captivity I did not ponder for weeks and months those very ideas of escape which have in the space of as many minutes flitted in wild crudeness through your brain? You therefore perceive that escape by means of *descent* from this chamber in an utter impossibility.”

“And by *ascent* still more impossible?” murmured Tunar in a faint and mournful voice, as hope died utterly within him.

The old man said nothing in reply: but he gazed steadfastly upon Tunar’s countenance, on which the slanting light from the window was falling.

“I have not yet explained to you,” resumed the grey-bearded prisoner, at length breaking a long silence, during which Tunar gave way to his desponding thoughts,—“I have not yet explained to you the full details of the treatment you may expect within these walls. I have told you that your food will be good and plentiful, and that you are free to take exercise on the roof of the tower at all times. I must now add that in the cold season there is an ample supply of fuel for firing, and that a lamp is allowed to lighten the long dark

hours of winter. And now methinks I have told you all in those respects."

"Then Schamyl is merciful and kind after his own fashion!" exclaimed Tunar, clutching at another hope. "I will send to him a message by the gaoler—I will entreat his Highness to hear me—I will tell the whole truth——"

"The Sultan Schamyl does not dwell at Garanrog," interrupted the old man; "and even if he did, the gaoler would bear no message to his Highness. This castle marking the confine of Schamyl's territory, is used chiefly as a depot and magazine for provisions and ammunition when his Highness leads his forces through these districts to make an irruption into the regions where his Muscovite enemies are to be encountered. Thus, serving as a commissariat-station as well as a border-defence—though sometimes alas! as a prison likewise," continued the old man, "Garanrog has been rendered impregnable; and the defences, whether natural or artificial, are strengthened by that vigilance on the part of the little garrison which is so intimately associated with the strict and rigid discipline that Schamyl has introduced amongst the soldiers serving under his banner.

"Oh! is it possible," cried Tunar, again speaking with the vehemence of desperation, "that I have nothing to hope for at the hands of Schamyl? Ah, I remember!—but my brain was so confused at the time!—I remember how, however, that he said he had come for useless purpose with his army into this region; and doubtless he is about to depart. Oh, for the means of

sending one word of entreaty unto him——"

"It is impossible," interjected the old man. "You will think perhaps that I am throwing a damp upon each successive hope as it presents itself to your mind: but would you have me deceive you? It needed for me the bitter experience of months and months of alternating hope and despair, when I was first a captive here, to teach me how to look my position calmly in the face. There is nothing so wearing nor harrowing as such a feverish mode of existence. But you are more fortunate——"

"Fortunate?" echoed Tunar bitterly.

"Yes—more fortunate," repeated the old man, still with the same unvarying calmness of his hollow sepulchral voice; "for when you enter your prison-house you meet one who is able to tell you that it is useless to plunge into that feverish state of mind; and it is therefore your own fault if you do not regain your self-possession and summon all fortitude to your aid. With me it was different! When brought within these walls, I found no companion—I was alone—and therefore I at first yielded to the wildest hopes, but only to see them disappointed one after another. Like you, I thought of escape: I plotted and planned—I lay awake at night—I racked my brain by day—until at last, by the study of all surrounding circumstances, I came to the conclusions which I have already detailed to you. I also strove to send messages to Schamyl: but the gaoler, though really a humane man, was on this point inexorable. In a word, here have I been for five years, entomb-

ed in utter solitude, until the present hour gave me a companion in yourself."

"And has not this solitude been awful?" asked Tunar shudderingly.

"At first it was intolerable," responded the old man; "but after awhile I made myself avocations—Of this however no matter! Let us speak of yourself."

"Tell me, then, candidly—you who know so much concerning his dread prison-house and the character of Schamyl,—tell me," cried Tunar,—“do you really think that he can be cruel enough to doom me to eternal captivity? Oh, I am so young——”

"Be calm—be tranquil," interrupted the old man. "You have asked me a question—give me the means of replying to it. In plain terms, tell me what you have done—or what you are supposed to have done?—for I remember you just now declared that you were innocent. Tell me also what the Sultan Schamyl said to you; for methinks I have gathered from your words that it was he in person who sentenced you to this prisonhouse."

"Oh, I recollect his fearful language!" said Tunar, again shuddering. "He told me that I was worthy of death, but that on account of my youthfulness he would spare my life—yet that I should be doomed to eternal captivity."

"It was in a similar sense," rejoined the old man, "that he spoke to me five years back—with this exception, that whereas he spared your life on account of your youth, he spared mine on account of my age. Schamyl is so far

merciful and lenient that he dislikes shedding blood except in the heat of battle."

"And you call it lenient," exclaimed Tunar, "to doom me who am so young and who have so many years to live, to endless imprisonment."

"As lenient as it was to condemn me who am so old and have so few years to live, to a similar fate, answered the grey-bearded prisoner. "I do not think of Schamyl with vindictive bitterness: I thank him for having spared my life. Though innocent of the crime imputed to me, yet did circumstances tell against me; and there was no wanton injustice on Schamyl's part in condemning me. All that I have just said in reference to myself, may perhaps equally apply to you. To these remarks I will add that Schamyl is inflexible—and that never from his lips would go forth a mandate for your liberation or for mine, unless heaven should send us some means of communicating with his Highness and incontrovertibly proving our innocence."

"And those means are utterly beyond our reach," said Tunar, in a tone of deepest despondency: for heaven will not work a miracle in our favour—and by no human agency may we hope to communicate with Schamyl."

There was a pause, which was broken by the old man saying: "You have not yet told me of what you are accused; nor have you even mentioned your name. Come, let us know each other better."

"I already know—or at least I have reason to suppose," said Tunar, "that your name is Dorval

—that you are a Frank by birth—and that you are a prisoner,” he added, hesitating for fear of giving offence, “on a charge of—of—”

“Being a spy on behalf of the Russians,” said the old man, thus calmly finishing the sentence which Tunar left incomplete. “I see that you have already heard of me,” he continued in a voice which had now had an accent of kindness running through its hollow tone; “and I thank you for the delicacy with which you were treating a subject that you thought might be a tender and a sore one. I like you better than at first—and I doubt not but that we shall become good friends. And now tell me something of yourself?”

“My name is Tunar—I am a Georgian by birth,” replied the youth; “and for many years—indeed from mine infancy down to a recent date—I was an inmate of the household of a worthy merchant of Tiflis. He perished a short time back; and the other day circumstances led me to journey through the wildest regions of the Caucasus. There I fell in with two travellers, whom I knew not; and having previously killed some game, I offered them a portion of my fare. Who should these men be but notorious and formidable banditti, on whose head every Government of the Caucasian regions had set a price. A detachment of Schamyl’s troops suddenly appeared—the banditti escaped—and I was captured. Unfortunate was it for me that unconsciously I had thus appeared to be on friendly terms with the brigand Kyri Karaman: for on being brought into Schamyl’s presence, vainly did I protest my innocence. He believed

me not—but condemned me as an accomplice and partisan of that formidable robber. Therefore am I here!”

The old man listened with attention to this narrative; and when it was concluded, he said calmly but confidently, “You suppressed something in your explanations to the Sultan Schamyl—as you are also now suppressing it to me.”

“Suppressed something?” exclaimed Tunar, colouring deeply. “How know you *that*?”

“A few moments back I knew it for *two* excellent reasons,” responded Dorval: “but now I know it for *three*. The third reason is the admission which you have just made from your own lips by asking me how I knew it? The other two reasons—which were the prior ones—shall be explained. In the first place because it would require stronger circumstantial evidence than your mere casual encounter with the brigands, to lead Schamyl to proclaim that you were worthy of death and then to doom you to eternal imprisonment. In the second place because you ere now in your excitement declared that if by any means you could communicate with Schamyl, you would tell him the whole truth.”

Again did Tunar blush deeply; but the conversation was temporarily suspended by the arrival of the gaoler and his assistant, bearing a mattress and blankets for the new prisoner, and the evening meal for both captives.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE TWO CAPTIVES.

THE gaoler and his assistant spread the mattress and the

blankets upon the stone bench at the foot of the huge pillar; and they placed upon the rude wooden table the two tin plates or pannikins, containing the evening meals for the captives. A large jug of spring water was added; and the assistant left the apartment to fetch a basin and ewer, as well as a napkin, with one or two other little necessities, such as soap and a hair comb, for Tunar's use.

"You will now have someone," said the old gaoler to Dorval, "to tell you the news of the great world much better than I have been enabled to communicate it."

"You have been very kind to me," answered Dorval: "and I shall ever feel grateful for the way in which you have discharged your duties."

"We do not wish to be unnecessarily harsh," observed the gaoler; "and I did not contravene my instructions when I communicated to you such flying reports which from time to time reached my ears."

At this moment the din of a cannon, fired at some little distance reverberated through the tower; and the old gaoler exclaimed to his assistant, "Go and haul down the great banner! His Highness the Sultan is taking his departure from this neighbourhood!"

"Will he march in the night?" inquired Dorval.

"Night and day are all the same to the heroic Schamyl!" responded the gaoler, his countenance expressing the enthusiastic admiration with which he regarded his chief. "Many a month or even many a year may now elapse before we see his Highness in this neighbourhood again. Ah! do you re-

collect the last occasion on which his Highness visited this district?"

"It was about a year back—was it not?" inquired Dorval. "I remember that I besought you to bear a message from me to this Highness but as you deemed it inconsistent with your duty——"

"I was compelled to refuse," said the gaoler, thus finishing the elder captive's sentence. I was grieved to refuse you anything, Dorval, but duty before all other consideration! Yes—a year has elapsed since the last visit of his Highness. Do you not recollect that the great silken banner was blown away from the flagstaff during the night——"

"Ah, truly!" ejaculated Dorval. "Was it never found again? I think I must have forgotten to ask the question——"

"No—it was never found," rejoined the gaoler. "The wind was blowing very strong at the time; and so the flag must have been carried across the mountains. Perhaps it is now rotting in some fathomless gulf: or perhaps it was picked up by peasants, and being cut into pieces, is now decorating the forms of some of the wives and daughters of the mountaineers. But here is my assistant!"

As the old gaoler thus spoke, his assistant appeared upon the landing, with the immense banner folded up into as small a compass as possible: but it still formed a considerable bulk. The gaoler bade the two captives "good evening," and then withdrew. The grating sound of the key in the lock and the shooting of the huge bolts into their sockets sounded drearily and dismally upon the ears of Tunar: but Dorval, having grown accus-

tomed to them, was unmoved by the din which produced a dispiriting effect upon his young companion.

They sat down to supper: but though the rations served to them were good and plentiful, Tunar could scarcely touch a morsel of the food which was before him. Dorval, on the contrary, ate with an appetite, and finished the contents of his dish. Tunar begged him to accept all that remained of his own ration: but Dorval assured him that he had eaten sufficiently.

"At first I was like you," he said: "I could not partake of my food. I had been wont to eat it in freedom; and in a state of bondage it was loathsome to me. But after awhile the cravings of hunger grew more and more intense; and then I finished my rations. I have ever since eaten with appetite—as you have just seen me do. Nevertheless, I have of late fallen away and become much attenuated. Look at my garments! You would scarcely think that they were made for me. And yet they were! At first they fitted me admirably: now they hang upon me like a sack."

"And yet," said Tunar, "according to all that I have heard flow from your lips, I cannot conceive that you are very unhappy. I think there is a great deal of philosophy in your disposition, and that you are completely resigned to your lot. It is not so?"

"I have taught myself," responded Dorval, "to bear my lot with patience: but as for becoming resigned to it, that is another thing!"

"Perhaps," cried Tunar eagerly, "you have a hope of escape,

despite all you ere now told me of the impossibility of effecting an egress from this tower?"

Dorval did not immediately make any reply: but at length he said, in his wonted and quiet manner, "There is scarcely any condition of life so utterly desperate as to be beyond the reach of at least some slight gleam of hope."

"Oh, true! true!" exclaimed Tunar, who felt the necessity of clutching at any straw of hope which might present to him. "Perhaps, then, you have conceived some design—some method of escape——"

"I did not say so," answered Dorval, with a cold tranquility which at once destroyed the hope that had prompted Tunar's question. "But who can tell what may happen? Schamyl may relent—though it is little likely. Or the Russians may besiege and capture Garanrog—which is even still more improbable. Yet nothing is after all impossible; for men bearing the character of inflexibility have bent to the cause of mercy—and castles deemed impregnable have been taken. Therefore, while there is life there is hope: and with this old adage must a prisoner sustain himself in his captivity."

Tunar however saw so little that was reassuring in Dorval's reasoning, that his heart sank completely within him; for he feared that Garanrog was impregnable.

"Let us now return," said Dorval, "to the tenour of that discourse which the appearance of the gaoler and his assistant are now interrupted. We were talking of yourself. I do not ask for your confidence, unless you think fit to bestow it upon me. If you choose

to shut yourself up in close reserve, we shall not be the worse friends on that account; for heaven knows it is our interest to be kind to each other, and to render our companionship as agreeable as possible."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Tunar: "such is indeed my wish!—and I will give you my confidence. I already feel that you are a being infinitely superior to myself—your words are fraught with wisdom—"

"Alas, young man!" said Dorval, shaking his head; "I have learnt much from the lessons of experience, and my years are thrice the number of yours. But let us devote this evening to conversation upon your affairs; and to-morrow we will discuss mine. If you bestow your confidence upon me, there shall be reciprocity."

"And I have already said that I will give you my confidence," observed Tunar.

But he was not altogether speaking with sincerity; for though immured in a fortalice where his imprisonment might be eternal, he had no intention of revealing the secret in connection with the Vale of Roses. He was intensely selfish; and even though there now appeared to be but little probability that the secret would ever avail himself, he still clung to it with all the tenacity of his egotistical, churlish disposition.

"I was saying at the time when the turnkeys entered," remarked Dorval, "that I had three excellent reasons for being convinced that you had either suppressed something in your explanations to the Sultan Schamyl—or that towards me you were maintaining a reserve

in reference to whatsoever took place between his Highness and yourself."

"I will answer you frankly," said Tunar. "I did not explain to the Sultan's soldiers, when they arrested me—nor to the Sultan himself, when brought into his presence—why I had been wandering amidst those wild uninhabited districts of the Caucasus; and this circumstance tended to confirm their belief that I was really a partisan of the bandit Kyri Karaman, and that my object was perhaps to watch for travellers or otherwise to aid the designs of that brigand."

"And why did you not give a full and complete explanation?" asked Dorval, who from beneath his shaggy eyebrows now intently watching Tunar's countenance.

The youth was at this moment completely master of himself; and we have before seen that on general occasions he was equal to all the arts of dissimulation. He therefore changed not colour—nor by the slightest sign betrayed that he was speaking falsely—when he said, "Would Schamyl or his soldiers have believed me if I had told them that having been compelled to fly from Tiflis, for killing a Russian officer in a duel, I sought refuge amidst the mountains of the Caucasus, and that, ignorant of the path I was pursuing, I became lost in the wilds where accident threw me in with Kyri Karaman? But there was another circumstance that I have not yet mentioned, which told against me. The instant Schamyl's soldiers invaded the spot where I was conversing with the bandit, I mistook them for the members of some lawless horde;

and I naturally enough obeyed the mandates which Kyri Karaman issued for the prompt effecting of our escape. This proceeding on my part seemed to corroborate the idea that I was veritably a partisan of that unprincipled robber. And now you know everything."

"Circumstances did indeed combine most fatally against you," said Dorval; "and I believe you, because I cannot see how you can have any interest in deceiving me. Besides, it is your own affair, and you were not compelled to give me any explanation at all unless you thought fit. Come!" he added, abruptly rising from his seat; "let us ascend to the roof of the tower—for the last rays of the setting sun are now glimmering over the western Caucasus, and the spectacle is a fine one."

Tunar accordingly followed the old man from the apartment; and they ascended the spiral staircase which led to the summit of the tower. The aperture of that staircase, where it joined the roof, was covered by a little building enclosed on three sides and opening with a doorway upon the roof itself. The battlements of the tower were about five feet high; and in one angle the tall flagstaff was upreared. The immense banner, which floated day and night over that tower in honour of Schamyl when his Highness visited Garanrog, or was encamped with his army in its neighbourhood, had been taken down, as we have already seen: but the cords by which it was hoisted when occasion required, were left to the staff. To this circumstance Tunar's attention was at once turned; his eyes were riveted upon the cord, which,

running through a hole at the top of the flagstaff, was not merely double, but likewise had a considerable portion of its length coiled round a couple of pegs at the base. Having estimated the length of the cord, Tunar looked over the parapet and calculated the height of the tower.

"At least seventy feet!" he muttered to himself; "and the cord must be nearly that length. it is slender—but it is evidently very strong," he added, still in a low musing tone, as he again fixed his eyes on the rope attached to the banner-staff.

"And have I not already convinced you of the futility of such dreams?" asked Dorval, who had thus penetrated the youth's thoughts. "Even if in the midst of a night of pitchy blackness you were to lower yourself by means of that rope into the inner courtyard, you could not effect your escape; for you would not only then be in precisely the same position which I ere now pointed out when supposing for argument's sake that you slew the gaoler, his assistant, and the sentinel that watches at the door at the foot of the staircase."

"True!" said Tunar, heaving a profound sigh: for again did his heart sink within him.

He and Dorval then looked over the parapet towards the west, where the last expiring rays of the setting sun glinted upon the peaks of the mountains in the horizon.

"Now tell me," said Dorval, "is it true that there is to be war between Turkey and Russia?—for the old gaoler assured me a few days ago that such is the rumour

"And it is true," replied Tunar. "The Russians have already invaded the Sultan's two Christian provinces on the north of the Danube; and Omar Pasha, the greatest of Ottoman generals, has been entrusted with the command of the Turkish forces along the line of that river."

"It is a war, therefore," said Dorval, "into which Great Britain and my own native France will perhaps be dragged. But no matter to us! The din of hostilities will not reach our ears in this secluded fortalice; and if we have nothing but the roar of the belligerents' cannon to chase sleep from our eyes, heaven knows that we may reckon on slumbering in tranquillity!"

Dorval then questioned Tunar relative to whatsoever other political matters were stirring in the great world, and concerning which the youth was enabled to afford him any information. They remained for nearly a couple of hours on the summit of the tower, discoursing on these topics. Tunar would fain have inquired into the circumstances which had led to his companion's captivity, and which had branded him as a Russian spy: but as Dorval now avoided all personal affairs, the youth was delicate in touching upon them. Besides, the old man had expressly said that he should defer until the morrow any explanations which he might have to give in respect to himself. They descended to their apartment, where Dorval produced and lighted the lamp which was allowed by the gaoler. They disapparelled themselves and sought their respective couches. The lamp was extinguished—they bade each other "Good

night"—and silence now prevailed in the tower.

It was long ere Tunar could compose himself to slumber: and when at length sleep stole upon his eyes, it sealed them closely, and he slept profoundly through exhaustion alike of mind and body. When he awoke in the morning he found his companion already dressed: he started from his own couch and hastily performed his toilet. While he was thus engaged, Dorval took a broom from a corner of the apartment, and therewith swept the paved floor.

"This is a duty," he said, "which you and I, Tunar, shall henceforth share between us. I take my turn to-day—you shall take yours to-morrow—and soon."

"Or rather suffer me to perform it altogether!" exclaimed the youth, who now felt anxious to conciliate the old man as much as possible; for he thought that if there ever could be a hope of escape, its realization must be brought about by the superior sagacity and experience of the Frenchman.

"Not so," replied Dorval, speaking in a kind tone, though with his usual sepulchral hollowness of voice. "I appreciate the goodness of disposition which thus led you to pay respect to my grey hairs; but there are no distinctions *here*. Captivity levels them all. Were I a king and you a beggar—or were the reverse the case—it would be all the same: we should be equals in our prisonhouse. Therefore we will share whatsoever little duties of this kind that there are to be performed."

As Dorval finished speaking, the turning of the key, the grating of the lock, and the drawing of bolts,

reached the ears of the captives ; and the old gaoler entered with the morning's repast. He spoke in a kind and cheerful manner to the prisoners ; and he then withdrew.

When the meal was finished, Dorval said to Tunar, "Let us take exercise on the roof of the tower ; and I will there give you certain explanations concerning myself."

The youth longed to hear them ; and he accordingly followed the old man to the summit of the edifice, where a magnificent view was obtained of the vast undulations of the surrounding scenery. There was a cloudless sky overhead : but a refreshing breeze blew across the mountain range ; and Tunar wooed it to his feverish throbbing brows. His aged companion likewise seemed to inhale it with satisfaction ; and after a little while he began to speak in the following terms :—

"In my own country I was called a Count, which is a title of nobility of no mean degree ; but as I have already said, little would it now matter if I had been a king and you were a beggar :—we are equal within these walls. My fortune was never very considerable ; and in the course of years I materially reduced it. I do not hesitate to confess that in my youth—and indeed up to the period of my prime—I was addicted to pleasure. I never married, but led a gay reckless existence, which might be termed happiness after its own fashion. I now look back upon it with disgust, and I loathe myself for my folly in having been beguiled by the idea that felicity and dissipation were compatible. When about forty-five, my tastes took a sudden turn ; and I threw up debauchery

and pleasure with as much ease as if I had been tossing off a garment which it no longer suited me to wear. I became studious : I taught myself many languages, including the one in which I am now speaking. Then I dabbled in a variety of experiments ; and profligate as I had previously been, I grew as insensate in my theories. For a while I believed in the philosopher's stone, until I wellnigh poisoned myself with chemicals in endeavouring to arrive at the art of projection. Then I fancied that I could make immense improvements in the steam-engine—though I must not speak of the steam-engine to you who doubtless have never seen one. In this experiment I wasted a considerable sum of money without achieving the slightest success. In short, I turned my attention to a variety of scientific pursuits ; and if I generally failed in reaching the results at which I aimed, I nevertheless picked up more or less practical knowledge by the way. My fortune grew less and less ; and the more it diminished, the more eager did I become to discover some means by which I might enrich myself. Yet I did not yearn for the possession of money in order that I might relapse into the ways of dissipation ; for I loathed and abhorred them. But I knew that money was power ; and I longed to become powerful. I thought of all that could be done by a man possessing the illimitable command of riches. There was a great deal of ambition with some little philanthropy mixed up in this craving of mine. Thus years passed away : and instead of becoming richer, I grew poorer. But though my studies and my research

ches, my speculations and my experiments swept away my gold without contributing one tittle to the replenishment of my coffers, I fancied that there was before me another prospect of some day obtaining wealth. I had an old relative, far stricken in years, and who had the reputation of being well off. I was his only kinsman; and I looked upon myself as his heir. One day—a little more than six years back—I was sent for in a great hurry to the country-seat of this relation; for he lived about seventy miles from Paris, which perhaps you know to be the French capital. My relation was dying. I arrived at his country-seat in time to receive the last words that fell from his lips; and these were of considerable importance. What he told me was two-fold. In the first instance he explained to me that so far from being a rich man, he was utterly insolvent, and that the property he might leave behind him would barely suffice to pay his creditors and bury him decently. In the second place he commenced a tale of quite a different description; but death cut him short in the midst of it—and so I need not further allude to the subject.”

Dorval paused for a few moments, and then continued his narrative in the following strain:—

“So, instead of finding myself a rich man at my relation’s death, I benefited not thereby to the extent of the smallest coin. I resolved to change my mode of life altogether; I was sick of speculative pursuits, in which I had wasted time, energy, and money; and you may smile perhaps when I tell you that I was seized with a mania to visit the wild scenery of the

Caucasus. With me to decide upon a project was at once to execute it. I set out and travelled with rapidity to these regions. It was precisely five and a half years ago that I first plunged amidst the wild scenes of this mountain-range. I had come well provided with all the requisite materials for taking sketches of the most prominent features; I had a portfolio filled with drawing paper, pencils, india-rubber, *et cetera*, enough to stock the shop of a small beginner intending to deal in artists’ materials. I wandered about, sometimes sleeping in a peasant’s hut, sometimes in a cave, sometimes upon the grass in the open air. Thus months passed away. My wayward steps led me one day to the plain which this castle overlooks. You may suppose that a fortalice having a site and an appearance which may be termed so gloomily picturesque, could not be lost upon one who was seeking artistic subjects amongst the sublime, the grand, the majestic, and the imposing. I therefore sat myself quietly down in the middle of the plain, and began sketching the castle. While I was at work two or three of the soldiers of the garrison came to see what I was doing; and as those rude mountaineers had but little idea of the art which I was pursuing, they were as much delighted as if they had been so many children when they recognised their towers, their ramparts, their heights, their rocks, even the very line of the narrow stone staircase itself, all being faithfully represented upon my paper. I opened my portfolio and showed them other views and sketches which I had previously made elsewhere. Nothing could

exceed their surprise and delight. They hastened off to the castle and told the tale to their comrades, many of whom likewise came down into the plain to see the man who had the power of depicting Garanrog with such miniature accuracy. They brought me some good food and wine; and in return I gave them a few little sketches. So we parted excellent friends; and I pursued my wanderings elsewhere amidst the wilds of the Caucasus. But I could no more foresee what was to be the result of that innocent occupation of mine when drawing the Castle of Garanrog than you could foresee what would be the result of offering some of your game to the two travellers whom you thought to be honest men but who turned out to be banditti."

Again Dorval paused for a few moments; and then he continued in the following manner:—

"Several days after my departure from the neighbourhood of Garanrog, I was journeying through the mountainous wilds,—my portfolio and my little portmanteau of necessaries being attached to the saddle of the good steed which I bestrode,—when I suddenly came upon a small party of Russians. They were about a dozen in number: they had dismounted from their horses, and were lounging upon the grass, eating and drinking. They questioned me: I told them I was a French artist, wandering about the Caucasus taking sketches from nature to serve as the originals for grand pictures of scenery which I intended to paint on my return to my native country. The officer in command of the little party of Russians was

a very gentlemanly man—intelligent—and a good judge of the art which I professed. He begged me to accept refreshment; and I readily assented. While I ate and drank, he turned over the contents of my portfolio, and was highly pleased with the sketches it presented to his view. But when he saw the drawing of Garanrog his joy knew no bounds. As I have already told you, it was accurate to the minutest detail, even to the indication of the line formed up the mountain on which it stands, by the ascent of steps cut out of the solid rock. He was skilled in military drawing, fortification, and engineering; and he begged permission to use a blank piece of paper from the portfolio in order to take a sketch of the castle and its defences from the sketch which I had taken, and which was then before him. In a moment of thoughtlessness I gave my assent. The Russian officer was soon deep in his drawing; but by degrees an idea began to steal into my head. I thought to myself that I was wrong to suffer the Russian to make this plan of an enemy's fortress, for I myself had been well treated and kindly used by the soldiers of Garanrog. I comprehended for what purpose the Russian officer wanted the plan; and I resolved that I would not have to reproach myself thenceforth with having played a part that was at all treacherous towards the generous and hospitable mountaineer soldiers of this castle. But just as I was on the very point of remonstrating with the officer, there was a sudden irruption of a strong body of mountaineers. The Russians, starting to their feet, betook themselves to their weapons.

The combat which ensued was terrific but brief: half of the Russians were slain—the other half with difficulty managed to save themselves by flight. As for myself I at the very outset of the engagement was made prisoner by one of the mountaineer soldiers: but this gave me little concern, for I had not offered to take any part in the fray, and I felt confident that when I proclaimed myself to be no Russian but a peaceful French artist, my liberty would at once be granted. I was however mistaken; for when the combat was over, the portfolio was closely examined; and behold! there was the sketch of Garanrog—and there was likewise the plan of the castle which the Russian officer had been drawing out! I then began to feel nervous—and all the more so when I found that I was regarded as a spy. I was hurried off to Garanrog, where the Sultan Schamyl was staying at the time. There I was at once recognised by those soldiers of the garrison who had seen me sketching in the plain a few days beforehand. All appearances were hostile to me. Vainly did I offer explanations: I was not believed—and I really cannot wonder at Schamyl's incredulity. Indeed the evidence was most damning against me; and if I had at once been hanged as a spy, Schamyl would only have done that which any other chief in the world would in similar circumstances have ordered to be performed. He however spared my life on account of my age and my grey hairs. You now therefore understand how I came to be a prisoner here, and why I said last evening that I had no vindictive enmity against the

Sultan Schamyl—but that on the contrary, I felt grateful to his Highness for having given me my life."

CHAPTER XLIII.

COUNT DORVAL.

SUCH was the narrative of the old French prisoner of Garanrog, and to which Tunar had listened with the deepest attention.

Several days passed, during which Tunar grew more and more pleased with the conversation of his fellow-captive. There was a certain dryness in Dorval's manner—a conciseness in his mode of speech, which at first created the impression that his temper was somewhat disagreeable, that it had become embittered by imprisonment, and that he was also prone to be dogmatic, peremptory, and authoritative. But this soon wore off; and Tunar discovered that the old man was naturally amiable and kind-hearted, though his misfortunes could scarcely have failed to produce a certain effect upon him. He spoke plainly, and in his discourse he was in the habit of coming to the point at once; because he naturally felt that in a prison it would be useless and preposterous to observe those strict formalities and delicate amenities which prevail in the gilded saloons of fashion. That such was the case Tunar soon comprehended. On the other hand, Dorval himself was making use of all his experience in the world to obtain an accurate estimate of the character and disposition of the youth whom circumstances had rendered his

companion; and he was inclined to form a very favourable notion on the subject. We have already said that Tunar was resolved to conciliate the old man as much as possible: he was therefore ever on the alert to render himself agreeable to Dorval, and to display his character in the most amiable light. Thus, as the days passed on, the two prisoners grew more and more attached to each other.

It has been said that occasionally with the rations a small amount of ardent spirits was allowed. This liquor was the purest alcohol, distilled from grain in the castle itself: it was colourless, and of the highest standard of strength. Tunar perceived that on the first occasion when these spirits were served with the rations, Dorval touched not a single drop, but contented himself as usual with the pure spring water. A love of strong liquor was never a vice of Tunar's: indeed, he was habitually most temperate; and therefore when he had once put his lips to the potent alcohol, he expressed his distaste for it, and vowed that nothing should induce him to imbibe such a burning fluid.

"You are right, Tunar," said Dorval; "such liquor is naught but slow poison. But still it need not be wasted—it is sometimes good as a medicament."

The spirits had been brought up in two very diminutive stone jars or bottles; and Dorval now proceeded to place them in a niche hollowed in the wall on that side of the apartment where his own bed was situated. Having done this, he said to Tunar, "It will be as well not to mention to the gaoler that we set aside our

allowance of spirits instead of drinking them; or he may think it needless to furnish us with another supply in future."

"Be it as you will," responded Tunar: and the incident quickly passed out of his mind.

On the next occasion when the gaoler brought up a supply of the potent alcohol, he said, addressing himself to Dorval, "You will have the kindness to return the other bottles as usual."

"Certainly!" ejaculated the old Frenchman. "I had forgotten to place them upon the table."

He then hastened to the niche, and produced the two bottles to which the gaoler alluded.

"I thought you intended to preserve the spirits in case of sudden need?" remarked Tunar to his aged companion, so soon as the gaoler had retired and the massive door on the landing was closed.

"Yes—I have preserved them," said Dorval, with the carelessness than it was even his wont to adopt. "I emptied the alcohol out of those two bottles this morning, while you were walking by yourself on the roof of the tower. I happen to have another bottle, which I managed to retain one day without the gaoler recollecting it; and if at any time you should take a fancy to a drop of the exhilarating fluid, it is of course at your disposal. But I should recommend you never to touch it."

Tunar said not another syllable upon the subject: but a strange suspicion had arisen in his mind—and he hastened to turn the discourse into another channel, for the very purpose of preventing the old man from fancying that such a suspicion was entertained concerning him.

Indeed, Tunar thought within himself that Dorval was not quite so abstemious as he had pretended to be—but that he had affected and likewise recommended such abstinence for the selfish purpose of getting possession of the youth's allowance of ardent spirits in addition to his own. Though Tunar was himself in many things a consummate hypocrite and a practised dissembler, yet he was shocked when he thought that he had thus discovered a weakness of the meanest and paltriest kind on Dorval's part. But it did not suit his views to give utterance to a single harsh word towards the old man for he still retained the impression that if ever an escape could be effected from within those walls, it must be by the aid of the Frenchman's superior sagacity. The two little stone Jars were again taken possession of by Dorval, and by him deposited in the niche close by his bedside.

For all the rest of that day Tunar thought of this occurrence, though he spoke not another syllable of allusion thereto, and though he likewise studied by his looks to prevent Dorval, from suspecting that it had produced any impression on his mind. When night came they both sought their respective beds at the usual hour: the lamp, which was temporarily lighted, was extinguished—and silence prevailed in the tower. Tunar slumbered; but how long he had slept he knew not, when on opening his eyes he became sensible of a feeble light flickering in the apartment. It was not the first beam of morning struggling through the window: it was evidently an artificial light. Tunar

remained perfectly motionless; and he so modulated his breathing as to convey the impression that he still slept. He was convinced that Dorval had lighted the lamp for some reason or another, and likewise that this reason was a secret one; for the youth said within himself, "if the old man were ill, he would have awakened me—he would have summoned me to his assistance!" *X*

Recollecting the incident which had twice occurred in respect to the ardent spirits, Tunar conceived that Dorval was indulging in his solitary potations while he fancied his companion slept, and that he thus drank at night so that his appearance should not in the daytime betray his application to the little stone bottles. Tunar felt infinitely disgusted: but he said not a word—he did not move in his couch—he continued to breathe as if he were veritably sleeping soundly as before.

We should observe that the position of Tunar's bed was such that he could not see Dorval's for the huge pillar formed a screen betwixt them. He thought of raising himself gently up to a sitting position and peeping round the pillar in the direction of the old man's couch: but he feared to be detected in the proceeding; and he said within his own mind, "Of what avail to anger him or to humiliate him by showing him that his mean selfishness is discovered? He would never forgive me!—and for the sake of a miserable drop of spirits, for which I myself indeed care not, it were madness to make him my enemy!"

Scarcely had Tunar arrived at this resolution, when he heard a

sound as if the old man were lifting his entire bedding, mattress and all, and then dropping it down again. The noise was not a loud one; indeed, if Tunar were really asleep it could not have awakened him. But still that noise was heard: the rustling of the straw contained in the mattress, was for a moment plainly audible. Then Tunar as distinctly heard Dorval enter his couch; and immediately afterwards the lamp was extinguished. Silence and darkness again prevailed in the room.

Tunar recollected what Dorval had said in respect to having a private bottle of his own; and he now therefore concluded that the old man was accustomed to hide it under the mattress of his bed. This was another circumstance only too well calculated to enhance the youth's disgust for what he conceived to be the meanness, pettiness, and paltriness of Dorval's proceeding, and he sank into slumber reflecting painfully thereon. But when they both arose in the morning, the youth still maintained the most amicable demeanour towards the Frenchman. He however watched for an opportunity when he should be alone in the apartment for a few minutes: and he then hastened to the niche in the wall against which Dorval's bed was arranged. There were the two little stone bottles: but on shaking them, Tunar discovered that they were both empty. He then lifted the mattress, and peeped underneath: but no secreted bottle was there,—nothing but the platform or surface of masonry on which the bed itself was wont to rest.

More than ever disgusted and surprised at the old man's conduct,

Tunar said to himself, "Even the very tale of the secreted bottle was a falsehood! The selfish Frenchman is as greedy as he is mean and paltry: he has swallowed the entire contents of those two little stone jars during the past night!"

Six weeks now elapsed from the incident which we have just related; and Tunar had therefore been exactly two months a prisoner at Garanrog. Every week when the allowance of spirits was served out, Dorval self-appropriated the whole quantity as on the two occasions already specified: but Tunar had not again found the lamp burning in the middle of the night. The spirits however always disappeared; and each time the gaoler brought in two bottles, two empty ones were restored to him. The youth had by this time got accustomed to Dorval's proceeding on the point; and he almost ceased to care for it, because he said to himself, "Old age is often selfish in mean and petty things; and captivity warps and narrows the feelings even still more. I will not quarrel with him on this account! But is it possible this man, so sagacious, so intelligent, so persevering in many things, as his former history proves him to be, can have resigned himself to pass the rest of his days within this horrible prison?—or may he not secretly harbour some project of escape which at present is not matured, or which he fears to entrust to me? I will endeavour to probe his mind—I will throw out some hint for that purpose!"

Accordingly, in the course of the same day on which Tunar made these reflections—and while they were seated together in their apart-

ment after two or three hours of exercise upon the roof—Tunar ejaculated, as if in a sudden paroxysm of impatience at his captivity, "Oh! would to God we were free, and that we could breathe amidst the hills themselves that breeze the freshness of which seems tainted by passing through the window of a prison-house!"

"And if you were free," inquired the old man, "what use would you make of your liberty?"

"Oh, my dear friend!" cried Tunar, "how can you ask that question of one who is in the years of his youth—and who, if free, would have all the world before him whence to select some path for his future career? If liberated from these walls, might I not offer the service of my sword to one of those Powers which will speedily be engaged in the deadly struggle of war?"

"And you would abandon your friend in captivity?" said Dorval, fixing his eyes keenly upon Tunar.

It instantaneously struck the youth that there was a more than usual significance in Dorval's regards, and that he had put this question for some purpose beyond that of mere conversation. He therefore hastened to exclaim, "No! I would never abandon you! If we were both restored to freedom together—or if jointly it were possible for us to effect our escape—I would ever cleave and cling to you as if I were your son! Oh, what joy would it be to accompany you to that splendid city of Paris of which you have told me so much, and which from your description I long to behold!"

Dorval had never taken his eyes off Tunar's countenance while the

latter was thus speaking; and the old man now turned and paced slowly to and fro half-a-dozen times in the apartment. Tunar saw that there was something of importance revolving in Dorval's mind: the youth was full of suspense—hope and fear were conflicting within his breast.

At length the old man stopped short; and again fixing his eyes upon Tunar, he said, "I have taken two months to study your disposition well and to form an estimate of your character. The very first day that you were here, I saw that you had plenty of enthusiasm arising from the very desperation of your position: for you remember that you talked wildly of slaying gaoler and assistant and sentinel, of scaling buildings, and attempting all sorts of mad or impossible deeds. I therefore doubted your discretion: for let me tell you, young man, that when an individual finds himself shut up in a fortalice so well secured as this, it is not by rash, precipitate, and violent measures that he may hope to effect his escape. On the contrary, he must bring all his philosophy to his aid; and even then, if he possess only a common mind, with the usual limited range of education and knowledge, he will fail to devise any project that may enable him to defy the thickness of walls, the height of towers, the massiveness of doors, and the numbers of sentinels."

"Good heaven!" ejaculated, Tunar, wildly starting up from his seat; "then you, my venerable friend, possess all that philosophy all that knowledge, and all that intelligence which are requisite

"Behold how you excite yourself!" said Dorval, with a look of reproach: yet it was with accents of kindness that he added, "If all which is harbouring in my brain were suddenly transferred to yours, I verily believe that you would be driven mad with the wildness of exultation!"

"Oh, I will be calm! I will be calm!" said Tunar, his entire form quivering with suspense and his voice tremulous from the same cause. "I see that there is hope!"—and he now sank upon the stone bench where he was wont to spread his couch at night; for he felt as if he should faint with the emotions that had taken possession of him.

"You remember," continued Dorval, "that the very first evening you and I were thrown together in this apartment, I explained to you the impossibility of escape by *descending* from the tower?"

"Oh, yes!" murmured Tunar, as hope again began to sink within him; "and I remember full well you said likewise that it was equally impossible to escape by *ascending*, unless I possessed wings to bear me away in bird-like soaring from the summit."

"Then you will admit," said Dorval, with a peculiar tone which at once reminded Tunar of the accents in which the old man had spoken when two months back he had made the allusion which the youth himself had just quoted—"you will admit, then, that if you *did* possess wings to bear you away from the top of the tower, your escape would not be an impossibility?"

Tunar gazed upon Dorval with

a look of absolute dismay and disappointment, as he thought within himself, "Good heavens, he is going mad! he is drivelling with age and captivity!—and there is no hope!"

"Perhaps you would not believe me," continued Dorval, who either did not penetrate the youth's reflections, or else did not think it worth while to make any particular comment upon them,—"*perhaps* you would not believe me if I were to tell you that in the countries of Western Europe, a certain branch of science has been brought to such a degree of proficiency that men have invented a machine in which they soar up into the air and by which long aerial voyages have been performed. Yet it is so!—and the invention to which I am now alluding is called a balloon."

Tunar endeavoured to persuade himself that the old man was really speaking in a collected and sensible manner: but still he had his doubts and misgivings—and therefore he listened with mingled interest and suspense.

"Look!" said Dorval, "and I will explain it to you."

Thus speaking, the old man took from his pocket a ragged faded old handkerchief, in which were wrapped some pieces of pencil and artists' crayons.

"My portfolio," he said, "with all the sketches it contained, was kept by Schamyl's soldiers when they took me prisoner: but fortunately I had many of my drawing materials about my person at the time—and those were left untouched. Here is a piece of white crayon; and the blackened wall of the room must serve as my canvas."

Dorval then proceeded to sketch

a balloon upon the wall, while Tunar followed his proceedings with a suspenseful interest, in which bewilderment was blended; for he was still at a loss to make up his mind whether the old man was in possession of his senses, or whether he had become a drivelling visionary. But as Dorval went on to describe the construction of a balloon—its nature and its mode of management,—when he explained how the huge silken globe itself might be inflated with any gas or vapour that was lighter than the atmosphere—and how a balloon of a given size would bear up men aloft amidst the clouds,—Tunar listened as if he were in the midst of a dream, which began in wonderment, passed into the phase of solemnity, and terminated in the wild ecstasy of hope. His natural intelligence gradually made him comprehend that everything that Dorval was now saying might be strictly consistent with facts; and when the old man had concluded, the youth flung himself into his arms, exclaiming, “Oh! you are indeed a superior being—and I feel infinitely your inferior!”

“You would not think this,” responded Dorval, in his usual quiet manner, “if you were in Paris or London; for in those cities balloons are common spectacles.

“It is wonderful!” ejaculated Tunar: but scarcely had he given utterance to the words when a sudden chill seized upon his heart—a damp fell upon his spirits—the golden vision in which he had been cradling himself, melted away in a moment; and as he sank upon the stone bench with a

countenance expressive of blank despair, he murmured, “But ’tis all useless! for we have not a single one of the many materials that are required for the formation of a balloon!”

There was a long silence, during which Tunar sat buried in the deepest despondency—while Dorval stood looking at him with pity, almost with contempt.

“What succour can I hope from one who thus abandons himself to the most insensate excitement or to the most coward despair?”—and now for the first time since their acquaintance the old man spoke with sternness to his youthful companion.

“Pardon me,” said Tunar, profoundly submissive and humble: “I ought not to question the sagacity of such as you! But if we both found ourselves naked in a desert and you were to speak to me of fashioning raiment to clothe ourselves where-withal, should I not be bewildered and confounded? I know that my ignorance is great; for you have ere now been telling me of wonders whereof I have never dreamt. But this ignorance of mine, by rendering me conscious of my own weakness, likewise makes me mistrustful of the capacities of others. I am not to be blamed for such ignorance—and therefore I again say pardon me!”

Dorval was not merely appeased, but even affected by a speech so meek, so humble, and so submissive; and he embraced Tunar, saying, “Poor boy! you have not offended me and your present conduct convinces me that you may yet become an able assistant in the execution of the grand project which I have formed.”

Tunar, though now once again wild with hope, nevertheless so far curbed his feelings to prevent the betrayal of them in their fulness; and he stood with a docile and submissive look, like a student waiting to be initiated into sublime mysteries by a competent master, though his heart was in reality palpitating and fluttering with violence.

"First of all," said Dorval, "let us obliterate this sketch from the wall. We must not even allow consummate ignorance, as personified in our gaoler, to have the slightest ground for suspicion."

Having thus spoken, Dorval effaced the crayon drawing by means of a damp towel.

Tunar was accustomed to roll up his own bedding during the daytime and deposit it in a corner of the apartment, because the stone bench against the pillar served as a seat for himself and Dorval when they took their meals. But Dorval's bedding was always left spread out upon that other stone bench which was against the wall. The old Frenchman now proceeded thither closely followed by Tunar. He drew off the bedding; and the stone bench was fully revealed. It was about six feet long, two feet broad, and two and a half feet in height. It had a solid appearance, as if it were one complete mass of masonry: while what might be termed the top or surface of the bench was formed of three flagstones.

"Now, my dear boy," said Dorval, "I am about to initiate you into the secrets of the stupendous project which I have conceived. This place"—and he pointed to the stone bedstead—"is hollow. I

hollowed it myself. It was originally filled with earth and mortar, hardened into a concrete substance; but I worked and worked until I excavated it so that I made it resemble a stone sepulchre or tomb, fitted for the reception of a coffin. When the wind blew very high at night, I used to carry the scraped and pulverised concrete to the summit of the tower: I scattered it by handfuls along the battlements—and thus was it all by degrees blown away in such a manner that nothing occurred to excite the suspicions of the garrison below. These three flagstones lift up. Beneath them are my treasures."

"Treasures?" repeated Tunar, careful to speak with as much mildness and with as little excitement as possible.

"Yes—my treasures," rejoined the old man, with a smile. "Not treasures of silver or of gold—though for aught I know to the contrary," he added, with a peculiar accent, "I may some day possess them likewise. However, what these treasures are you shall now see."

Having thus spoken, Dorval lifted one of the flagstones; and Tunar peered forward with anxiety to look into the recess thus revealed. But instantaneously recollecting his resolve to avoid any wildness or excitement, he retreated a step or two.

"Do you remember," inquired Dorval, "that the very first evening you were brought a captive hither, the gaoler spoke to me of the great silken banner which was lost about a year ago?"

"Yes—blown from the flagstaff" ejaculated Tunar: "perhaps rotting in a ravine—perhaps decorat-

ing the persons of the peasant girls of the mountains !”

“It is well the gaoler thinks so,” observed Dorval : “for the great banner is here.”

Thus speaking, he drew forth the green and red standard of the Sultan Schamyl, neatly folded up into as compact a form as possible.

“You will admit, Tunar,” he continued. “that it was a bold stroke to steal the flag : but still it proved successful. It is now fashioned into the shape of a balloon. I asked for needles to mend my clothing, and they were furnished me. The flag itself supplied the threads of silk by which the lozenge-shaped pieces were sewn together. But then you will ask how have I rendered it air-tight ? I will tell you. You already know that when I was captured by Schamyl’s soldiers I had certain artist’s materials about my person. Amongst these were several pieces of India rubber. India rubber may be dissolved in linseed oil ; and then, if mixed with pure alcohol, it swells to many times its original bulk. The week’s supply of linseed oil for the lamp and spirits allowed for my use enabled me dissolve and expand the india rubber ; and with that solution the balloon of silk is completely covered. It is consequently air-tight and water-tight.”

Tunar listened with an interest so keen and intense that it almost amounted to a feeling of painfulness.

“My car for the balloon,” continued Dorval, raising the second flagstone, “is so far fashioned that it only requires to be put together. Look ! here are the sides—and here is the bottom. They lie flat

one upon another in this recess, and take up but little room. When the times comes it will not require an hour’s work to put all these pieces together into the shapeliness of a car ; and the cord of the flagstaff will furnish the means of joining them securely.”

Dorval, while thus speaking, had produced the pieces of his intended car ; and he proceeded to explain how he had made it.

“I have already told you,” he said, “that in the winter firewood is allowed. I selected those pieces which were sufficiently strong and elastic for my purpose ; and I have woven them together into a sort of a wicker-work. It is all rude enough, as you see ; but still it is substantial. Now, when the time comes that we can use the balloon——”

“And when will that time come ?” asked Tunar, his whole frame quivering and his voice tremulous with the powerful emotions that were agitating him.

“In the long dark nights of winter,” replied Dorval : “on the darkest, deepest, blackest night which may present itself for the furtherance of our purpose ! It was for the coming of winter that I was patiently waiting when you became the companion of my captivity. But let me proceed in my explanations. When the time comes, I say, we shall render the cord of the flagstaff available in more ways than one. Some little portion of it will be used to join firmly the several parts of our car together. But we shall require the greater length to be fixed to the point or apex of the balloon, with an end passing through a ring on each side, and coming down so as

to sustain the principal weight of the car. Then we shall have a piece of cord passing all round the balloon like a girdle, and fastened on each side to our two sustaining cords. Our mattresses will be cut into slips; and these will be attached to our hoop-like cord and to our car, so that the sustaining power may be rendered complete."

"Oh, all this is wonderful!" murmured Tunar, with a sense of awe upon his mind as he felt that on the score of intelligence he was towards Dorval as a pigmy in size to a giant.

"But now you will ask me," proceeded the old man, "how the balloon is to be inflated? This point is likewise provided for:"—and raising the third flagstone, he added, "Behold this barrel! When first I was consigned as a prisoner here, it was given to me as a seat: but when I wanted it for its present purpose, I pretended that being deficient in firewood, I had burnt it. It has since been hidden in this recess. For a long time past all the ardent spirits which have been furnished to me, have been poured weekly into this cask; and herein likewise are the rations of alcohol which you have received since your captivity. When the time comes to make the grand experiment, we shall have spirits sufficient to inflate the balloon with its vapour exhaled by means of fire."

Having thus spoken Dorval replaced the three flagstones, and then re-arranged his bedding upon them. Tunar was literally too much confounded and amazed—too much impressed with awe and wonder, to be enabled to give vent to the enthusiasm of excitement,

even if he were otherwise unable to restrain such wildness of feeling.

"And now," said the old man, "let us ascend to breathe the fresh air upon the roof of the tower: for this is the day of revelations, and I have yet many marvellous things to make known unto you."

CHAPTER XLIV. X

DORVAL AND TUNAR.

WE have already, in a hurried and partial manner, endeavoured to describe the feelings with which Tunar was inspired while listening to the explanations of Count Dorval. To him those explanations were fraught with wonderment: but still, as we have hinted, his natural intelligence and good sense enabled him to follow their progress with a perfect comprehension of their details, and to understand that they were consistent with probability and reason. And when he heard how the scientific Frenchman had saved all the rations of spirits, Tunar felt ashamed of himself for having entertained notions so derogatory to a personage who now appeared to him as high-minded as he had previously deemed him mean and selfish. But that there should be a possibility—nay, more, a probability of escape from that dread mountain-fortalice, was sufficient to excite the wildest joy in Tunar's breast: and he would have given way to it with an equally wild enthusiasm, had he not restrained himself at the recollection that the old Count, in his own mental sedateness, disliked and mistrusted such ebullitions.

They ascended together to the

roof of the huge tower; and for some little while they paced to and fro in silence, each absorbed in his reflections. Tunar was now revolving in his mind whether he should not reveal the grand secret respecting the Valley of Gulistan to his aged companion; for he thought to himself that if any one could devise a means of taking the last necessary step to enter into that vale without the danger of perishing in the folds of the slimy serpent at the extremity of the long dark cavern, this man was assuredly Dorval! Indeed, Tunar not merely from this selfish motive but likewise in the enthusiasm of gratitude which he experienced towards one whom he already looked upon as his deliverer from Garanrog—was on the point of breaking silence to commence the revelation of the secret, when that silence was first broken by Count Dorval himself.

"I told you, Tunar," said the Frenchman, "that I have yet many marvellous things to reveal unto you. I am now about to initiate you into a secret—or I should rather say into as much of it as I myself am acquainted with—"

"How strange!" ejaculated Tunar; "for I myself have a secret which I have as yet hidden from you, but which I was on the very point of making known when you began to speak. And this secret, too, is not entirely known to myself!—the last link of the mystic chain thereof is as yet undiscovered—"

"Your words, young man, appear to have a strange meaning," interrupted Dorval; "and now that

I remember how there was something mysterious in your wanderings through the wilds of the Caucasus——"

"I confess," said Tunar, "that the tale which I told you of the death of a Russian officer in a duel was a fabrication—and that I had another motive for plunging amidst those Caucasian wilds. But oh! be not angry with me—withdraw not your friendship——"

"I am not angry with you—and I withdraw not my friendship," said Dorval. "You had a right to keep your own secrets, even as until this day I have kept *my* secrets from *your* knowledge. The only difference is that you invented something whereas I invented nothing to cover this reserve."

"But you will also admit," exclaimed Tunar, "that you demanded explanations of me, while I on the other hand pressed you not with a single question?"

"This is true," said Dorval: and then with a smile,—and a smile was so strange and rare a thing with him,—he added, "Perhaps we were equal after all; for if you invented your tale of the slain Russian officer for one purpose, I invented my tale of the concealed bottle for another. So when I vaunted of having invented nothing, I was wrong. But in respect of this secret of yours—what is it?"

"It came to my knowledge, by an accidental insight which I obtained into certain private papers of my deceased master Mansour, that there was a beautiful valley cradled amidst the wilds of the Caucasus—a terrestrial paradise, teeming with gems and the precious metals, as well as with the

choicest fruits and the loveliest flowers——”

“The Vale of Gulistan!” exclaimed Dorval. “Yes—that vale exists!—there cannot be a doubt of it! And now perhaps you understand why I recently said that the time might possibly come when I should possess great riches.”

“Yes—I recollect the observation!” cried Tunar: “but I thought at the moment that you alluded to such riches as the probable result of your scientific pursuits, if you should ever effect your escape hence and go forth into the great world again.”

“No—I have not the slightest faith in my own scientific acquirements as the direct means of earning wealth. But,” continued Dorval, “may not my little knowledge in this respect avail as the means of bearing me—I will say of bearing *us* to the blessed spot where riches are to be procured? In a word, the same machine—I allude to the balloon—which may waft us hence, can enable us to descend into the terrestrial paradise of which we are speaking.”

“True! Oh, true!” exclaimed Tunar: “and by those means all the perils of the long dark cavern-entrance may be avoided!”

“Ah!” ejaculated Dorval, “then you yourself have been more fortunate than I—you must have discovered the spot?”

“I know precisely where it is,” answered the youth. “I have been, so to speak, upon its very threshold: but a monstrous serpent guards the place—and I fled in dismay.”

“And how fled you with your life?” asked Dorval, who was somewhat incredulous at the story of the serpent.

“It was providence—accident—I know not what!” rejoined the youth. “My hand touched the folds of the serpent—and yet it remained quiescent!”

“And how amidst the almost labyrinthine mazes of the Caucasus,” inquired Dorval, “could you again find your way towards that blessed spot?”

“The vale is surrounded by mountains utterly inaccessible to any human foot that should seek to climb them: but one of those mountains—the highest of them all—is cleft in twain for a considerable distance down its crest; and by that sign should I know the spot again.”

“And that sign may guide us when sailing through the air in our balloon,” rejoined Dorval: “so that it may perhaps be unnecessary to dare the dangers, whether real or fancied, of the long dark cavern whereof you speak. But before we enter more minutely into such particulars as you yourself may be enabled to give, let me continue the explanations which I was about to proffer when you ere now interrupted me. Not that they are of much consequence after everything you have been just saying: for I thought at the time I was on the point of initiating you into a grand secret, whereas I find that it is even better known to you than unto myself.”

“Yet must any narrative coming from your lips,” said Tunar, “be fraught with interest. I beseech you, therefore, to give me these explanations.”

“In order to do this,” replied the old man, “I must enter upon a tale which at its outset may appear to have little enough to do with the

main topic of our discourse; yet you will in due time perceive how it fits into the framework of this vast and ample picture which we are mentally contemplating. I have already told you, during the two months that we have been together, many things relative to the history of my native France. You will know therefore of what particular period I am speaking, when I begin by stating that towards the close of the reign of Louis the Sixteenth there dwelt in Paris an elderly gentleman, of aristocratic family, but of ruined fortunes. His name was Mignot. Strange to say he had ruined himself by acts of charity and philanthropy—real charity and real philanthropy without selfishness! He was profoundly pious: and so excellent was his character that he was surnamed *Le Bon*, or 'the good.' At length his patrimony was entirely dissipated—his ancestral mansion was sold—and he retired to a lodging: I believe it was a veritable garret. All of a sudden Mignot disappeared from Paris; and no one knew what had become of him. He remained absent for two years—at the expiration of which period he returned, the evident possessor of great wealth. He repurchased the family estates, his country-seats, and his town-mansion; and he became more profuse in his charities and his liberalities than ever. His riches seemed boundless; so that his mode of living as well as his remarkable philanthropy attracted the notice of the Court. Already was the political horizon darkening—already was the growling thunder of revolution heard in the distance—already were the

waves of insurrection beginning to toss and heave within the capital; and the King was striving to render himself popular. He thought that the bestowal of some signal honour upon the philanthropist Mignot would be agreeable to the people. Louis Sixteenth therefore sent for that personage, and conferred upon him the title of Marquis. Soon afterwards the revolution broke out, and the King was dethroned. Then came the Republic—and then the Reign of Terror. The aristocracy had either fled, or else stayed only to perish on the scaffold. Mignot was one who remained, believing that he at least was safe, and that the goodness of his disposition as well as the magnitude of his bounties towards the people would be his best safeguard. But in those times there were villainous spies and selfish denunciators; and in the midst of so much confusion it was impossible but that the innocent would often be confounded with the guilty. To be brief, the worthy Mignot was arrested and thrown into prison. The charges against him were that he was an aristocrat—that he had virtually declared against the popular cause by accepting a patrician title from the King at the very time when the struggle was going on betwixt the Monarchy and the Democracy—and that after being notoriously impoverished he had suddenly obtained immense wealth, which could only be accounted for by the supposition that he had received in trust some portion of the treasure which the King and Queen were thought to have amassed in preparation for flight from the country. When brought before the revolutionary

tribunal, Mignot defended himself against the charge of having become a partisan of Royalty in opposition to the people: but he was incautious enough to add that he had been a partisan of neither cause. The Public Accuser caught at this admission, and proclaimed that whosoever was in appearance lukewarm or neutral, must in his heart be inclined to that cause towards which his aristocratic predilections necessarily tended: he denounced neutrality itself as a crime when every citizen ought to have declared in favour of a cause; and he concluded by enunciating the doctrine that he who was not for the people was against the people. Mignot, when called upon to answer in respect to his acceptance of a patrician title, declared that it was at the time contrary to the modesty of his wishes, but he had deemed it his duty to bend to the will of his Sovereign. This was another unfortunate line of defence for the worthy Mignot to adopt: but his case was doomed to be rendered even still more desperate—for when interrogated with regard to the source of his recently acquired fortune, he remained silent. On being pressed with queries, he said that he could give no other answer than that his wealth was honourably and legitimately acquired: but he positively refused any further explanation. He was therefore condemned to death on the various charges which had been brought against him!"

"Unfortunate man!" exclaimed Tamar. "And thus not even his virtues saved him!"

"Alas, no!" replied Dorval. "Mignot was confined in the prison

of the Luxembourg awaiting his turn to go forth to the guillotine. He occupied the same cell in which there was a young priest of the name of Dorval. You start when I mention that name: but this priest to whom I allude was an uncle of mine. Mignot was religious, even to a taint of superstition; and now that he found himself under sentence of death, he became impressed with the idea that the immense fortune which was the source of all his troubles had been placed in his hands by an evil genius in order to work out his ruin, and not by a good genius that the wealth might be beneficial to him. He sought holy consolation from the Abbe Dorval, to whom he revealed the secret source of the immense riches which had proved so calamitous to him. But before he made this revelation, he bound the Abbe Dorval by the most solemn oath never to seek the same means of enriching himself if it should ever chance that he regained his liberty and that his life should be spared by the revolutionary tribunal. Shortly afterwards the unfortunate Mignot was taken out, with a number of other condemned prisoners, to perish on the scaffold of the guillotine. A little time elapsed—and then came the fall of Robespierre. The prison doors were thrown open; and amongst the liberated was my uncle the Abbe Dorval. Years passed on—the Empire succeeded the Republic—and the Restoration succeeded the Empire. My uncle rose to high dignity in the Church: how he became a bishop, and was generally esteemed. Without being addicted to dissipation or debauchery, he was nevertheless convivial in his disposition

and exceedingly hospitable. He was also charitable; and thus he not merely expended his episcopal revenues—which, by the bye, were not large—but being careless in money-matters, he contracted debts. His real financial position was not however generally known; for the usurers and money-lenders were particularly cautious how they spoke of their dealings with a bishop. He was thus considered to be wealthy, when he was actually insolvent."

"Ah!" exclaimed Tunar; "I think that I now begin to comprehend of whom you are speaking! You allude to that relation whose heir you considered yourself to be, and to whose country-seat you were summoned when he lay upon his death-bed upwards of six years ago?"

"The very same," said Count Dorval. "I told you that when summoned to his death-bed he discoursed with me on two important points. The first was to acquaint me with the fact of his insolvency, and that therefore I had nothing to hope for at his death. But the second point was to make me aware of the means of acquiring boundless riches. He began by telling me how, upwards of fifty years back, he was the fellow-prisoner of Mignot at the Luxembourg—and how Mignot had explained to him the secret source of his wealth——"

"The Vale of Gulistan!" exclaimed Tunar.

"Precisely so," responded Count Dorval; "for it appears that Mignot, after ruining himself by his charities, was initiated into that secret; and his two years' absence from Paris, ere he returned

laden with new wealth, was spent in a visit to the mountain-cradled paradise of the Caucasus. I should tell you that my uncle had religiously observed the oath which he had taken to Mignot, to the effect that he would never seek to penetrate into that valley. I must likewise add that Mignot's revelation of the secret to my uncle was not under the seal of the confessional, but only as friend might confide in friend; and thus there was no harm in my uncle on his death-bed communicating the secret to me. As you may suppose, I listened with astonishment, and perhaps with some little degree of incredulity: but the Bishop went on with his description of the valley as he had received it more than half a century back from the lips of the condemned Mignot. Having concluded the description of the vale itself, my uncle was about to enter on those explanatory details that were necessary to show me how to discover the precise situation of Gulistan and how to penetrate into it; but, as I have previously informed you, death suddenly cut him short in the midst of his wondrous narrative."

"And I can conceive," said Tunar, "that you were almost reduced to despair when you found that the riches which for a moment seemed within your grasp, had slipped as it were from your hand!"

"So far from being reduced to despair," rejoined Count Dorval, "I shortly afterwards set off from France to travel to the East, and penetrate into the wilds of the Caucasus, with the determination of devoting all my energies to the discovery of the Vale of Roses. I have already told you that I longed for

riches on account of the power which is wielded by him who has wealth at his command: and thus had I every incentive to exert all my perseverance, energy, skill, and patience to prosecute that discovery. I adopted the disguise of a travelling artist as that which was best suited to my purpose, it being the least likely, as I hoped and thought, to involve me in peril or to render me suspicious. My uncle the Bishop had just lived long enough to give me some faint idea of the geographical position of the Vale of Gulistan; I learnt from his lips that it was situated to the north-west of Tiflis and a little more than a day's journey from the southern frontier of Daghestan, the territory of Schamyl. But beyond these few details I knew nothing. Still I was not disheartened; and I was prosecuting my researches, when I was captured, as I have already informed you, and lodged as a prisoner in the castle of Garanrog."

Thus terminated Count Dorval's explanations, to which Tunar had listened with the utmost interest and attention. The youth in his turn took up the thread of the discourse; and described to his aged companion the means of access which he had discovered to the Vale of Gulistan. He said nothing of Prince Danial, the Princess Leila, and Klodissa: he kept their names entirely out of his narrative; and he represented that unassisted he had found the shelving pathway into the ravine, the bridge of trees across the torrent and the long dark cavern at the extremity of which his hand had encountered the slimy coils of a serpent.

There now seemed to reign the completest confidence between the

two captives; and they had ample food for their discourse during the interval which was yet to elapse ere the presence of the long nights of winter would enable them to carry their project of escape into execution.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BALLOON.

TIME wore on, and no change took place in the condition of the prisoners. The Sultan Schamyl came not again during those elapsing weeks into the vicinage of Garanrog; and Tunar dreamt not of escape by any other means than through the aid of the balloon. The apparatus, so laboriously and carefully contrived by the old Count, remained unsuspected by the gaoler, who regularly paid his two diurnal visits; and the rations of alcohol were every week consigned to the cask.

Sometimes of a night the materials for the formation of the balloon were brought forth from their place of concealment, and were duly inspected by the two prisoners. Count Dorval instructed Tunar in the minutest details of aerostatics; and the youth listened with the profoundest interest to these lessons which so intimately regarded the means that were in contemplation for his escape from Garanrog. As the car was now intended to contain two persons instead of one, Count Dorval strengthened and somewhat enlarged the pieces of the wicker framework; and in this task he was skilfully and cheerfully assisted by Tunar. Thus everything went on well, as far as their ultimate hopes were concerned;

and as the days shortened and the nights lengthened—as the atmosphere grew colder and the lower peaks of the Caucasus became covered with snow—they both hailed the deepening winter as the harbinger of the moment when the grand experiment was to be made.

At length the time seemed to be at hand; and Dorval set to work on his final preparations. He required ballast for his balloon; and this he obtained by detaching several of the smaller stones belonging to the masonry on which his bed lay; but he left these stones in their places until the instant should arrive for using them. He also needed a grapnel; and this he likewise fashioned. He removed a strong iron bar which had been originally placed across the upper part of the open doorway on the summit of the tower to sustain the masonry that rested upon it; but as that masonry had long ago become as solid and concrete as if it were all but one piece, the bar was no longer needed. The gazer was never accustomed to ascend to the roof of the tower, unless it were on the few occasions when the great banner was hoisted; and even if he should now take it into his head to mount to the summit, there was little chance that he would notice the disappearance of the bar. This bar, by being heated in the fire was easily bent so as to form a grapnel. But now a long rope was required to render that grapnel available when the time should come. After some reflection, Dorval decided that he and Tunar should begin to render their bedding serviceable. They accordingly employed the whole of their time in pulling out the strong threads

which formed the coarse fabric of those mattresses; and these they twisted into a rope. The work was executed with the utmost care; but they soon became adepts at it, and it progressed rapidly. Every night Dorval ascended two or three times to the roof of the tower, to judge of the weather and the phases of the moon; and at length came the moment when he said to Tunar, "To-morrow night, in all probability, we shall attempt our grand enterprise!"

"To-morrow night!" repeated the youth, with a feeling of ecstatic exultation: but then the next moment his soul sank appalled from the idea of the tremendous peril which was to be incurred by an ascent into the regions of the air.

"Throughout the greater portion of the ensuing day there was an almost complete silence between the two captives: each was absorbed in his own reflections. Dorval was calm and collected: but still he meditated profoundly:—he mentally reviewed every detail of his project to assure himself that nothing was wanting to effect its complete success. As for Tunar, now that the moment was drawing nearer and nearer for the grand experiment, his imagination conjured up numerous dangers of which in the flush of his hopefulness he had not thought before. His mind was uneasy and restless. Though a prisoner, he clung to life; and he asked himself why he should risk it on so mad an enterprise? It was all very well, he thought, for an old man who had so short a time to live, to become thus desperate: but for himself, who had years and years before him, would it not be better to trust

to the chapter of accidents for his release than to dare that mighty danger? But then, on the other hand, he recalled to mind all the lucid explanations which Dorval had given him in respect to aerial voyages: he mentally surveyed all the arrangements, so minute, so precautionary, and so complete, which had been effected;—and when he looked upon Dorval's calm countenance, he said to himself, "It is precisely because the old man *has* so short a time to live, that he is resolved to spend his few remaining years in freedom, wealth, and happiness. He is therefore full of confidence in the result of his experiment!—and if he who knows so much more than I of these subjects be thus firm in his hope and trustfulness, wherefore should I despair?"

It will be seen that Tanar's mind was agitated by a variety of conflicting ideas; but he was careful not to betray his restlessness to the old man, who if he had fancied that this youthful companion was afraid, might probably have abandoned the enterprise. Thus the hours passed—the dusk set in early—and the gaoler came to bring the evening's provender.

"It threatens to be another night of pitchy blackness," said the gaoler, thus unconsciously alluding to the very subject which at the moment was uppermost in the minds of the captives.

"Do you think so?" asked Dorval, with his wonted calmness. "To us prisoners all weather is the same. It is only those who are free that rejoice in the beauty of brilliant nights, or are impeded in their plans by the gloom of dark ones."

"I did not mean to say any-

thing," replied the gaoler good-naturedly, "that should touch you upon a sore point."

"I know it—I know it, my good friend!" rejoined Dorval; and seizing the gaoler's hand, he pressed it warmly, exclaiming, "God bless you for your kindness towards us!"

"Good night, gentlemen," said the gaoler; and he then withdrew.

The massive door of the landing was closed; the din of the shooting bolts and the grating of the key in the lock sounded upon the ears of the prisoners; and Tanar thought to himself, "I have heard them for the last time. To-morrow at this hour I shall be rejoicing in freedom—or my mangled corpse will be a prey to vultures in some profound ravine or on some mountain-side."

"I have bidden farewell to that good man," said Count Dorval: "though he understood not that it was the blessing of a final adieu which I was bestowing upon him!"

The prisoners sat down to their repast; and when it was concluded, Dorval looking Tanar fixedly in the face by the light of the lamp, said "You know that the moment is now approaching?"

There was so much calm courage in the Frenchman's demeanour, that the youth caught its inspiration; and he exclaimed, "I know it—and I rejoice!"

"Tis well, my young friend," said the Count. "And you assure me that your heart fails you not in the slightest degree?"

"You are full of confidence—are you not?" inquired Tanar, steadily meeting the old man's gaze.

"As morally confident of success

as man can be," replied Dorval : and his looks corroborated his words.

"Then I also am full of confidence!" rejoined Tunar, firmly : and he really felt so.

Indeed he was now so full of fortitude, that he wondered at the apprehensions to which during the day he had abandoned himself; and he was likewise inwardly ashamed of them.

"To work, then!" said Dorval : "to work, Tunar! Our respective tasks are already planned and defined."

Each now seized upon the knife which had been brought up for use at meal-time; and each began to cut up his bedding into strips for the formation of ropes. This work occupied about three hours: for the strips had to be carefully twisted and strongly knotted together, Dorval had over and over again calculated what entire length of rope could thus be furnished: and when the whole task was completed, he found that his calculation was correct to a nicety. This was an important achievement; for so much depended upon a sufficiency of material wherewith to carry out the operations.

It was now about ten o'clock at night: and Dorval ascended to the summit of the tower. In a few minutes he returned, with the intimation that everything was propitious to the prosecution of the enterprise. The night was of inky darkness: it seemed as if a sable pall had been spread over the face of heaven: and through that pitchy arch of gloom no ray of moon or star was penetrating. For a moment a sensation of awe—almost of horror—seized upon Tunar, as he thought

of ascending up towards that vault of Cimmerian darkness, to soar amidst the black storm-clouds, or to burst amidst the regions where the snows are formed. But the next instant the feeling passed away, when he beheld the eyes of the old Count gleaming with an exultation which that calm countenance of his was so little wont to display. And then Tunar thought of the Vale of Gulistan in which full summer was now reigning though it was winter elsewhere throughout the vast region of the Caucasus. He thought of the flowers that were blooming in that delicious valley—of the trees laden with the most luscious fruitage—of the softly gliding crystal streamlets—and of the birds singing upon the boughs, in a spot where all was joy and happiness, and where Nature smiled at the snow-capped mountains which shut out the wild and horrid regions beyond. He thought likewise of the priceless gems and the precious metals which abounded in that valley, and which were as ready to the out-stretched hand as the fruits and flowers themselves. All these ideas swept through his brain, and his heart leapt with a hope and joy as complete as on that day when he for the first time heard of the possibility of escape.

And now the two prisoners went to work. The three flagstones were removed from the bed of masonry in which the materials for the balloon were concealed; and Dorval began to draw forth his apparatus in detail, while Tunar conveyed to the summit of the tower the stones that were to serve as the ballast. This task occupied him for three or four journeys; and when it was

concluded, he unfastened the rope from the flagstaff and drew that cordage down. Having wound it into a coil, he descended with it to the apartment where Dorval had been effecting a few little preparations prior to the requisition of the rope.

And now that cord was duly measured; and it was found of a length sufficient to answer all purposes. It was cut accordingly. One long piece was doubled so as to ascertain the exact middle; and then, just where that middle was, it was attached to the apex of the balloon. On either side of the balloon a little ring made with twisted silk was already fashioned; and through these two rings were the extremities of the rope respectively passed. Then another length of rope was wound as a girdle or pliant hoop completely about the balloon; being knotted to the two descending ropes at the point where they passed through the rings. The reader will understand that by this arrangement the whole weight of the car would be sustained by the ropes without the slightest chance of tearing the silken balloon itself. To the girdling cord were now attached some half-dozen lengths of the twisted mattress fabric, which had been strengthened by having slips of the blankets twisted around them. There could not be a doubt as to the capacity of all these various suspenders to sustain the full weight of the car.

Tunar, standing upon the mass of masonry which had been wont to serve as the resting-place for his bed, held up the balloon by the apex as high as he could reach: but still its lower part dragged con-

siderably upon the floor—for the banner which had served for the material of the globe was of immense size, as the banner of the Sultan Schamyl always is. It had measured, as Dorval assured Tunar, thirty feet in length, by about five-and-twenty in width; and yet when hoisted on the summit of the tower of Garanrog, it had seemed but of moderate dimensions to those who beheld it from the court-yard below—and no larger than a lady's kerchief when seen from the midst of the plain which the frowning fortress overlooked.

By the time all these arrangements were completed, Dorval calculated that it must be half-past eleven o'clock. He again ascended to the summit of the tower; and in a few minutes he returned, with a still brighter gleaming of exultation in his eyes—for the night continued as propitiously dark as the captives could possibly desire.

"We shall have a good hour's work," said the old man, to put together the frame-work of our car; and then there will be at least two more hours occupied in inflating the balloon. But we must be in no hurry to start; for we shall voyage rapidly, and it will not suit our purpose to have too long a period of darkness before us. Now let us convey our materials to the roof!"

Tunar first of all shouldered the cask of spirits, with which he ascended the stone staircase; and he deposited the barrel on the uppermost step but one—so that, as the reader will comprehend, it was inside the little house or building which crowned and covered the staircase itself, and which had an open doorway looking upon the roof. Then Tunar descended, and

carried up the grapnel and some pieces of the car. Another journey, and the remainder of the car was upon the roof. The next task to be accomplished was for himself and Dorval to carry up the balloon—but so carefully as to avoid twisting or entangling any of the complicated ropes, because when once on the summit of the tower, they would have to work in total darkness.

"I have already assured myself," said Dorval, "that up the walls of this spiral staircase there is not a single nail nor any jutting angular piece of masonry that may tear our silken balloon."

Tunar admired the prescience of this intelligent man who had thought of everything and provided for everything, even to the minutest precaution against accidents. The balloon was borne upon the roof; and a rope, fastened to the apex, was attached to the flag-staff in such a way as to be calculated to keep the balloon fast, as well as in a somewhat slanting position, when the time should come to inflate it; so that there might be no chance of its upper part being seen above the parapet of the tower. Not indeed that there was much danger of this; for the night continued to be of pitchy blackness.

And now Dorval and Tunar began to put together the framework of the car. There was as we have already said, the four sides and the bottom. Pieces of rope had been cut in readiness to be fastened in the proper places! but as the proceedings had to be conducted with the utmost carefulness, and the two prisoners were working in a depth of gloom, the labour occupied them even somewhat

longer than Dorval had predicted. But it was of vital importance to render the car as strong as possible; and therefore they hurried not over their task.

When the car was completed, the work of attaching it to the various ropes commenced. But all these ropes had been so accurately measured in the apartment below that it was now merely a finishing operation which could be achieved with but little trouble. Into the car the ballast was lifted; and the grapnel was likewise adjusted in readiness for use, with its length of cord wound compactly about it.

The night—or more properly speaking, the morning—continued to be utterly dark, with a darkness which seemed as it were to entomb the workers on the summit of the tower.

"Everything progresses bravely, my dear boy," said the old man, not now speaking in the sepulchral monotony of his voice, but with a certain degree of tremulousness which denoted the exultation of sublimest confidence.

"Heaven be thanked!" responded Tunar, whose tone quivered even still more than that of his aged companion—but it was likewise with joy and confidence, for he too felt assured as to the result.

And now came the final process—that of inflating the balloon. Tunar descended into the apartment and procured the lamp. This he placed upon one of the uppersteps, just behind the cask, so that it should throw upon the roof of the tower no light whose glimmering could be discerned from below. The mouth of the balloon was dragged just within the open door which has been so often mentioned; and

Dorval directed Tunar to hold the silk in such a manner most convenient for the inflation. The Count now reeved the rope which had been attached to the flag-staff, in such a way round the staff itself that he could bring the extremity of the rope towards the car, to keep the balloon in its place while it was being inflated, and to be easily cut or slipped at any moment when the two adventurous prisoners should have entered the car and be in readiness to ascend. Then Dorval knocked off the head of the barrell; and by means of a torch formed of linen twisted suitably for the purpose, he commenced the process of inflation. He so arranged this torch that when once dipped into the potent alcohol and lighted, it should continue to be fed from the contents of that barrel without the risk of setting the whole volume of spirit in a blaze. Every now and then Dorval bade Tunar ascertain if the balloon were inflating; and the youth felt that the silk was spreading and spreading, and that it puffed out as it were with resistance against the contact of his hand. And each time Dorval assured him that everything was thus progressing according to his wishes.

Many hours had now passed since the first preparations had commenced in the apartment below; and Dorval calculated that it must be about three o'clock in the morning when the inflation of the balloon was complete. The great swollen globe of silk—perfectly air-tight, and not suffering a single breath of its inhalation to escape—was rolling and tossing now considerably higher than the parapet, as if impatient to be freed

and to ascend into that sphere to which it was hoped that it would soar. The mast creaked as if it were about to snap, strong and supple though it were; for it was a stately fir-tree cut from one of the Caucasian groves.

"Now, my dear boy," said the old Count, "everything is in readiness. Enter the car—and commend yourself to God: for the power of human intelligence has reached its limit in this thing. But be of good cheer!—for heaven helps those who help themselves."

Tunar—wild and excited with hope—was too full of exultation to have the slightest room for a dastard feeling within his breast. He stepped into the car; and Dorval immediately followed him.

"We will succeed or perish together," said the oldman, embracing his youthful companion.

But it was only for a moment that the Count thus held him in his arms; and then he said, "Kneel down and hold tight! I am about to cut the rope!"

Dorval likewise knelt down; and the next moment the rope was cut. There was an instantaneous jerk, as the rising power of the balloon rapidly unwound the rope from the flag-staff as soon as the knot at the car was severed; and then the machine rose slowly and languidly into the dark air.

"Out with the ballast!" ejaculated Dorval: and away went the stones clattering upon the roof of the tower and dropping with tremendous din in the court-yard below.

The effect was immediately felt; and up soared the balloon into a region of pitchy blackness. *K*

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE AERONAUTS.

THE stones which had served for ballast, were not of very considerable dimensions; but when falling from that great height, they created a tremendous din on the summit of the tower, and a still louder noise in the courtyard below. Several of the soldiers rushed forth from the guard-house, thinking that one of the battlements of the huge tower must have fallen: but all being then still, they were inclined to return to the fireside, when the officer in charge decided upon prosecuting the search. We have already alluded to the rigid discipline maintained amongst all Schamyl's soldiers; and that officer of the guard therefore felt that if there were anything wrong in respect to the prisoners, the garrison would be blamed for the slightest remissness of duty of which they might be culpable. The old gaoler had been awakened from his slumber by the din of the falling stones: he now made his appearance, provided with his keys; and into the tower proceeded some dozen members of the garrison. They ascended to the prisoners' room: it was unoccupied—and behold! the masonry which had supported the bed of the old Frenchman had been hollowed out, and a portion of the side was missing. All the bedding that belonged to both prisoners had disappeared, with the exception of the straw of the mattresses; and this was scattered about the place. Seized with consternation and bewilderment, the officer, the gaoler, and the soldiers rushed to the roof

of the tower,—the foremost falling over the empty barrel which was in the open doorway. The prisoners had evidently effected their escape!

A closer examination showed that the cord of the flag-staff was gone; and this circumstance, together with the disappearance of the bedding, suggested the idea that Dorval and Tunar had let themselves down from the roof of the tower. The alarm was soon spread throughout the fortalice; and a general search was commanded. None of the sentinels had however seen the fugitives: the two soldiers who maintained guard where the cannon was planted to protect the flight of steps cut in the rock, could with equal positiveness declare that no one had passed by their post. Torches were now everywhere waving along the ramparts of Garanarog: a detachment of soldiers was sent down into the plain; but no clue to the fugitives could be acquired. Only one thing was certain—and this was that Dorval and Tunar had by some means effected their escape!

The commandant of the garrison, finding that all endeavours within the castle or in its immediate vicinage to fathom the mystery were unavailing, sent off a mounted force at daybreak, with instructions to scour the wilds in a southerly direction—that is to say, beyond the limit of Schamyl's territory; and these soldiers were charged to spend days and weeks, if needful, in the pursuit: for the commandant dreaded lest Schamyl should punish him for what might be deemed a remissness of duty; whereas if the fugitives were recaptured, the ire of that Prince would be appeased.

Little suspected the inmates of Garanrog Castle that while they were everywhere searching upon the firm soil, the two adventurous fugitives were soaring high in the regions above. Yet so it was. The balloon, lightened of its ballast, shot up into the pitchy blackness of the air; and then meeting a current of wind, it was borne along at a considerable rate. Tunar, however, fancied that when once the upward movement had ceased the machine remained stationary; and after a while he expressed his apprehension that it might descend in the neighbourhood of Garanrog. The old Count comprehended the idea which had thus taken possession of the youth; and he speedily gave him to understand that the balloon was making its way through the clouds of heaven.

And now, what were the sensations of that old man who had thus made science triumph over a thousand difficulties—what the sensations of that youth who was thus far sharing in his success? Dorval experienced an exultation which was however to a certain extent subdued by the natural philosophic equability of his mind; but on the other hand, Tunar was intoxicated with delight—he was inspired by the most enrapturing ecstasy, when he found that he was no logner a captive within the walls of Garanrog. On the part of Count Dorval, that more rational feeling of triumph—that philosophic pride of success—continued, and enabled his mind to resist the shocks which from various circumstances of terror soon assailed it. But it was different with Tunar. Presently, when the balloon rolled and tossed in the cross-currents of

the air, like a ship when meeting the cross-currents of the ocean, his soul was appalled—a stupendous consternation seized upon him—he clung to the sides of the car with an awful sinking of the heart as if his very life were ebbing out of him. Even when the balloon was in reality floating tranquilly onward, but to his senses seeming as if it were utterly becalmed in the pitchy darkness of the air, it was a long time before he could regain his self-possession or divest himself of the awful feelings which had ere now made the blood curdle in his veins. He dared not ask the old man if he thought there was much danger?—for he dreaded to be deemed a coward; and thus Dorval suspected not how terribly his youthful companion was ever and anon racked by the circumstances of the aerial voyage.

On went the balloon. Tunar could take no note of passing time; and after a while Dorval informed him that the dawn had just begun to break in the east. The wind was now freshening; and the balloon, again oscillating and tossing, was borne amidst the clouds—those waves of the air—as a ship is borne upon the waves of the ocean. It was presently a strange, a grand, and sublime spectacle to behold the first beams of the morning sun tinting the edges of the clouds, and thus producing a feeble glimmer beneath the black vault of heaven, as if a few straggling beams were gradually and lazily penetrating into an immense cavern where all was utter darkness before. But the wind increased: the balloon oscillated more and more—sometimes giving so terrific a jerk

that the old man and Tunar were compelled to crouch down as well as they could in the bottom of the narrow car, and cling to the upper edge with all their might and power to prevent themselves from being thrown out. The machine—which had appeared to be so strong and compact, though of such rude materials, when first put together—now seemed to be all crazy and rickety,—the ropes tearing at it as if threatening every moment to rend it to pieces, or to snap away from it, thereby leaving the balloon to soar up to the highest regions which it could reach, and the car itself to fall down upon the earth. Then indeed did Tunar at length inquire of Dorval whether there were any danger?—and the old man replied, “You could not hope, my dear boy, at the very outset, to face such an enterprise without finding it to be replete with peril. The danger is no doubt immense—but only in proportion with the advantage that had to be gained if the undertaking should succeed. God is merciful; he has prospered us thus far: let us hope that he will protect us until the end.”

Tunar perceived little that was consolatory in these words: they only served the more forcibly to convince him of the magnitude of the danger that he was incurring. In the selfishness of his nature he would have reproached Dorval for leading him into such peril: but for very shame he dared not.

The glimmering of morn was now sufficient to show the aeronauts the peaks of the mountains above which they were passing; and Tunar was thus enabled to estimate the rate at which they were proceeding. It was a sublime

yet fearful spectacle as this vast panorama of mountain and valley gradually developed itself beneath their feet, and they looking down upon it like birds from amidst the clouds! The cold was intense! the hands of both the aeronauts were benumbed; yet still they clung with tenacity to the wicker-work of the car. When Tunar glanced towards his aged companion, as the beams of morning now played upon his hirsute countenance, the youth perceived that the old man's eyes were gleaming with the fire of hope and anticipated success; and thus his own confidence gradually returned again. A fine subject for a painter was the head of that old man—his long grey hair flowing away from his high open brow, so to speak like a meteor,—and he looking out from his balloon as it was borne through the ocean of the air, like the patriarch of old from the window of his ark on the ocean of the deluge!

“Now that it is growing quite light,” said Dorval, “keep you a good watch, Tunar, upon the features of the Caucasian wilds beneath our feet. Did you not say that the highest peak of the mountains which girdle Gulistan is split in twain?”

“Yes,” replied the youth, his heart kindling at the idea of being perhaps shortly enabled to penetrate into the valley where summer ever reigned. “I should know that peak again immediately!”

“We may have passed it—and yet, according to my calculations,” continued Dorval, “that is scarcely possible, after all you have told me. The wind has been blowing from the north; and these calculations assure me that we cannot be

very far distant from the beauteous valley. The balloon is losing its power—we are gradually and gradually getting lower and lower —”

At that instant an ejaculation burst from the lips of Tunar; and pointing in a particular direction, he cried, “Behold the cleft peak!—behold the reigon of Gulistan!”

Count Dorval looked attentively in that direction for nearly a minute; and at length he said, “Yes! I behold the cleft peak!—but I fear that the power of the balloon will not last long enough to convey us thither. No!” he continued, after having carefully estimated the distance of the cleft peak and the ratio at which the balloon was perceptibly descending “we shall alight at some place short of that mountain-ridge.”

As the balloon was now proceeding steadily, Dorval was enabled to loosen his hold upon the wicker-work, and examine the state of his grapnel, so as to have it in readiness for use at any moment when it should be required to assist their landing on a safe and convenient spot.

“Oh, is it not possible,” exclaimed Tunar, “that we can descend into the midst of the Valley itself? Behold! there is the cleft peak!—there is the girdling range of mountains! It seems as if we were now about to halt on the very threshold of complete success without the power of advancing farther!”

Again did the old man study the distance to the cleft peak, and then calculate the power of the balloon by the ratio at which it was perceptibly descending: but he shook his head, observing, “We

might perhaps be landed on the side of that girdling range of mountains: but to clear the barrier in the balloon and descend into the Vale itself, I see that it is impossible! If we alight on the mountain-side, we shall be perpetrating a deed of the rashest description: for the towering heights are inaccessible—and perhaps at our feet we shall behold some terrific yawning chasm—so that no means of ascent or descent would be left open to us, and we should perish of starvation on that wild, horrid spot!”

“Then, after all,” said Tunar, in a tone of bitterest vexation, “we shall find ourselves no better off and no farther advanced than I was when last in this region! We shall have to enter the long cavern and combat with the monstrous reptile which guards it. We are even worse off than I *then* was; for I had firearms and a good sword—whereas *now* we have not a single weapon, either offensive or defensive!”

Instead of repining, Tunar, at any little disappointment which you may now be experiencing,” said Count Dorval, in a tone of mild but serious reproach, “you ought to be thankful that heaven should have brought you thus far in safety, after having passed through dangers far greater than you could possibly have dreamt of. As for the serpent—But of *that* no matter for the present.”

“Forgive me my good friend,” said the youth, assuming a meek and submissive demeanour: “I confess that I spoke hastily and ungratefully——”

“Enough” said Dorval, “you have expressed your contrition—and

it is sufficient. Henceforth learn to exercise patience and perseverance, and to avoid repining at those contrarieties which arise from no fault of your own. Now let us look out for a landing-place.

The balloon was at this time scarcely a quarter of a mile high in the air: and beneath it was a tremendous ravine, at the bottom of which a torrent was boiling, and foaming, and rushing onward until it was lost from the view beneath a mass of overhanging rock. In many parts of the scenery upon which the aeronauts looked down, the snow was lying thick; and upon thy lofty trees it formed a white canopy which had a singular effect when viewed from overhead with the prismatic rays of the sun shining through the clouds upon it. Then might be seen a large frozen lake which was shining like quicksilver;—and then there was a plain of considerable extent, which Count Dorval selected for the landing-place.

The grapnel was now thrown out,—the car of the balloon being by this time within thirty or forty feet of the ground. For some little while the grapnel dragged without attaching itself to anything that would hold it securely: but at length it caught the long, curving, snake-like root of a tree left bare above the ground. The balloon experienced a violent jerk. But for this its occupants were prepared; and in a few minutes it sank gradually, so that they were enabled to leap out.

Then the old man threw himself into Tunar's arms, exclaiming with much emotion, "I embraced you when we set off on the most perilous voyage ever undertaken by human beings!—I embrace you now

again, in congratulation for our safety!"

Tunar could not help feeling moved by the words of that adventurous old man to whose science, sagacity, and daring he was indebted for his escape from the castle of Garanrog, and he returned that embrace with much real fervour.

They looked around them; no habitation was nigh: they were in the midst of the wildest regions of the Caucasus. They were both suffering with hunger—the excessive keenness of the air having sharpened their appetites: but they had no means of procuring any provisions in that desolate spot.

"If we were once within the circuit of yon mountain boundary, exclaimed Tunar, we should find all the fruits of summer in delicious contrast with the destitution and nakedness of this horrid region!"

"According to the estimate you may form," asked Dorval, "how far distant are we from the secret means of approach to the Vale of Gulistan?"

Tunar contemplated the cleft peak of the mountain: then he surveyed the position of the sun; and after some minutes of reflection, he exclaimed, "I have it! We are barely half a league's distance from the very spot where I was captured by Schamyl's soldiers! Let us seek it. I can thence easily find my way towards the ravine into which we must descend in order to reach the long dark cavern. In something less than two hours we may find ourselves at the mouth of that cavern. And then—"

"And then," added the old man, "we must trust to ourselves to conquer all the remaining difficulties which may bar our entry into the

Vale of Gulistan. We will speak of the serpent presently."

It was almost a look of affection that Count Dorval flung upon the balloon, which, now completely collapsed, lay upon the ground.

"Should this machine be discovered by some of the rude mountaineers," he said, "ere it rots away, or is shattered to pieces by the violence of the hurricanes which so often sweep through the regions of the Caucasus,—it will afford a subject of marvel for their untutored minds!"

Tunar was already leading the way from the spot where he and his companion had alighted upon the earth after their stupendous aerial voyage; and Dorval, with another last lingering look at the balloon, now followed his youthful guide. In about three-quarters of an hour—for their path was uneven and difficult—Tunar recognised the spot where he had been captured by Schamyl's soldiers. There was the particular configuration of surrounding heights which he recollected; but the streamlet of whose crystal waters he had drunk, and on whose bank he had discoursed with Kyri Karaman, was now swollen into a turbid river. The trees which a few months back had afforded him delicious fruits, were all dead; and nature there wore its sternest and coldest winter-garb. Tunar bethought himself of the little eave in which he had been wont to repose when a sojourner on that spot: he remembered the lamp, the oil, and the materials for striking a light, which he had left in that cave. If they were still there, of what service might they be in the prosecution of their enterprise in

the long dark cavern forming the entrance to the Vale of Gulistan!

The youth communicated his hope to Dorval; and they sped to the cave. With an indescribable sensation of joy did Tunar behold the lamp, the oil, and the materials for striking a light, in the very spot where he had left them. Nay, more!—there was a bottle containing a small quantity of wine, and which Tunar had likewise left there. The invigorating draught was shared between the old man and the youth; and they both felt refreshed and cheered.

"Now," said Tunar, "we have the distance of about a league to walk in order to reach the sloping path leading down into the ravine."

"Were it double the distance," responded Dorval, "I have energy and spirit sufficient to accomplish it."

They continued their way,—Tunar acting as guide. Notwithstanding the altered features of the scenery changed from the verdure and smiling aspect of summer, to the barrenness and scowling demeanour of winter—Tunar was at no loss to take the proper course. The cleft peak of the mountain served as a beacon for his main guidance: but in respect to the exact route towards the spot where the sloping path commenced, his course was facilitated by his recollection of jutting rocks and other features of scenery which at the time he had committed to memory to serve him as landmarks.

But as he continued his way in the confidence that it was the correct one, he reflected upon other matters. What if Prince Danial should happen to be in the Vale of Gulistan? what if Klodissa were

likewise there? Would not the entrance of himself and the old man be disputed?—and would not the Prince, with the firearms which he was certain to have about him, be more than a match for them both? And then too, was not Klodissa alike intrepid and vindictive? and would he not be certain to suffer punishment for his past offences? Yet, on the other hand, might not the presence of the venerable Dorval inspire those persons with pity and commiseration?—and when the tale should be told of months of imprisonment in Garaarog, and of the wondrous means by which the escape was effected, would it not awaken the sympathy of whomsoever that narrative should be related unto? And then again, there were the chances that the Vale would be found untenanted,—that Danial, Leila, and Klodissa, having enriched themselves on the occasion of their first visit, had as yet found no need to penetrate into the terrestrial paradise any more?

“At all events,” said Tunar to himself, “it will be as well to examine the cavern in the vicinage of the deep ravine; for if those persons be now in the Valley, their horses will be doubtless stabled at the cave.”

The youth did not choose to mention the names of Prince Danial, the Princess Leila, and Klodissa, to Dorval; because he had hitherto abstained from doing so—and if he were now to touch upon additional topics, they would naturally engender additional explanations, which he did not think fit to give, in reference to his own antecedents. He therefore in silence led his companion to the cavern which

served as a last halting-place for whomsoever journeyed amidst those regions towards the Vale of Gulistan. The cave was deserted; and there were no indications of any one having lately been there,—no remnants of provisions nor bottles containing wine.

Having assured himself on this point, Tunar set out again, followed by Count Dorval; and they proceeded through the mountain pass, over a rugged and uneven ground, which suddenly terminated at a precipice fringed by trees and wild shrubs. Those trees were the hardly firs of the Caucasus which resist the nipping breath of winter; and the shrubs were evergreens. Thus the fringe of that precipice still completely concealed the shelving pathway which lay beneath. The snow had likewise collected in a bank or ridge against that fringe of verdure; and thus in winter the secret of the ledge-like path was more completely concealed than even it was in summer.

“We are now,” said Tunar, “about to descend the sloping path which I have so often described to you. But have you thought how we must qualify ourselves to encounter the terrible serpent in the cavern on the opposite side of the ravine?”

“Of that quiescent serpent of which you have so frequently spoken to me,” replied Dorval, “I have still more often thought: but it was not necessary until now to make you acquainted with the nature of my reflection. You believe that the serpent was under the influence of some particular charm when you penetrated into that cavern?—and you apprehend that this charm may not exercise

its spell-like influence over the reptile on the present occasion? Now, for my part, Tunar, I share not in your belief at all. I have no faith in the existence of the charm at the time—and therefore no dread of the same nature which you now experience."

"Then what do you believe?" asked the youth, enlivened with hope as he prepared himself for some new proof of the old man's sagacity.

"Granting that there was really a serpent in that cavern," continued Dorval, "I can only think it was gorged with a recent prey when you touched it, and that therefore it was powerless to hurt you: or else I conjecture that it was an effigy, and no real living reptile at all. If the former were the case—I mean, if it were a serpent gorged with its prey—there is no reason to suppose that it still inhabits that cavern; for the reptile race does not cling to particular spots. It is ever on the move, as its wants and other circumstances prompt or impel. But if it should be still in the cavern, rest assured that it is numbed and torpid with the excessive cold which now prevails in this wintry region. On the other hand I am inclined to conjecture that it was a mere effigy. The serpent, Tunar, has ever been a famous emblem and symbol in the East; and its image, either in brass or stone, is found at the entrance of all places whence superstition, selfishness, or a loftier policy has sought to exclude intrusive steps. Then wherefore should not such an effigy have been placed at the entrance of the Vale of Gulistan? Methinks that I can even read the sacred meaning

of an allegory in the fact. The piety of the earliest possessors of the secret of Gulistan may have led them to believe that it was the veritable Garden of Eden in which our First Parents dwelt for a while, where they sinned and fell, and whence they were expelled by flaming swords borne by angel-hands;—and thus that same piety which engendered such a belief, may have induced those who thus believed, to place an effigy of the serpent on the very threshold of Gulistan, allegorically typical of the fact that the beguiling tempter is *outside* the portals of that paradise, and is no longer permitted to address its insidious wiles to the elect who are suffered to enter there!"

Tunar listened with the deepest attention to this discourse, every syllable of which was fraught with interest, and every sentence of which struck him with the power of an argument. He recalled to mind as well as he could, the sensations which he had experienced when his hand came in contact with the reptile in the utter darkness of the cavern; and he now thought to himself that it might indeed have been an effigy of brass or of stone to which the settled dampness of the cave had imparted the slimy feeling which enhanced the horror of his idea that it was a real living reptile that he was thus touching.

"Again," he cried, "am I indebted to your intelligence!—and I yield to the arguments suggested by your superior sagacity! Come, let us proceed! My heart is now inspired by a courage and a confidence which on that one particular point I possessed not before!"

"At all events," added Dorval,

"it will be only a wise precaution that we arm ourselves with stout sticks as the only weapons of offence or defence which present themselves to our hands in this region."

The suggestion was at once followed! and the little colloquy being ended, the two adventurers hastened to prosecute their enterprise.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE CAVERN.

A Passage through the bank of snow was speedily formed; and then Tunar led the way amidst the fringe of shrubs, Dorval closely following. Many months had elapsed since he had last trodden upon that spot; and then he was tracking in the wake of others who were serving as his guides—but now he himself was acting as a guide as if the entire secret were familiarly known to him. But on the present occasion the descent of the path was not so easy as when Tunar first descended it; for it was in many places encumbered with snow. Being completely fringed with trees and shrubs all along the slanting edge overlooking the precipice, the snow had formed as it were in banks or wedges between that fringe and the wall of rock on the face of which the ledge-like pathway ran. But the two travellers were provided with stout staves! and with these they were enabled to clear for themselves a passage.

The bottom of the descent was reached; and now Dorval and Tunar were in the ravine. But if the torrent had roared and thundered in its depths during the

summer season, how tremendously did those waters now boil and eddy, foam and bellow on, swollen as they were with the snows of winter! That the hurricane had been there, was shown by the fact that two or three of the largest trees were lying by the side of the torrent, evidently torn up by the roots; while from other trees which had stood against the fury of the gushing whirlwind, huge boughs had been broken off. Most of the trees being of the fir species, retained the greenness of their appearance; while the hardy shrubs and evergreens formed a thick underwood of verdure, in many places covered with canopies of snow.

Tunar and Dorval crossed the bridge, and pursued the winding path which led amongst the trees up the slope on the contrary side from the precipitous wall of rock down whose face they had descended. In consequence of the unevenness of the road and the frequent accumulations of snow which had to be surmounted, they proceeded but slowly; and it was thus with a feeling of awe and solemn dread that the old Frenchman had leisure to survey the wild scenery which surrounded him. The Vale of Gulistan might be likened to a beautiful city, of which the circle of huge towering mountains were the ramparts, and the ravine which also in a circle enclosed the mountain-barrier itself, was the moat. Down the counterscarp of this stupendous natural fortalice had the travellers descended: up the escarp they were now plodding their way. They were the besiegers endeavouring to force an entry into that well-defended place!

And now as they approached the

black mouth of the cavern, Tunar could not altogether repress his fear lest the reasoning of his aged companion should be erroneous, and that the monstrous reptile should in full malignant vitality harbour within the depths of the cavern. Dorval fathomed what was passing in the youth's mind: and he said, "Give not way to apprehensions, Tunar! Surely the courage of an old man like me ought to inspire you with the fullest fortitude?"

"Yes—I am nerved," said the youth, assuming a tone of as much confidence as possible: "and I will prove to you that I am so!"

The entrance of the cavern was now reached; and Tunar proceeded to strike a light by means of the materials which he had brought with him. The lamp was soon burning; and the youth instinctively flung a keen, penetrating glance forward into the cavern: but that look, piercing though it were, could not reach its farthest extremity. He however saw that the walls and roof of the cave were rugged and uneven, and that for some little distance within its entrance a curious wild green plant was twining,

"Suffer me to advance first," said Dorval, extending his hand to take the lamp. "If there be really a reptile capable of doing mischief, the monster will seize the foremost as its victim; and I am an old man the loss of whose life will be less deplorable than that of your youthful existence."

For an instant Tunar, in his natural selfishness, mingled with cowardice, was about to surrender the lamp into Dorval's hand; but a suddenly arising sentiment of

shame intervened to save him from so dastard a proceeding. Assuming, therefore, under the influence of that shame, the virtue of a magnanimous courage, he cried, "No, my venerable friend!—whatever risk is to be first dared, shall be encountered by me!"

Having thus spoken, he pushed on as if valiantly into the cavern, Dorval following. They proceeded for upwards of two hundred yards along that subterranean hollowed in the bowels of the mountains; and all was silent save in respect to the echoes of their own footsteps. And now the cavern began to grow narrower and narrower; and Tunar held the lamp high up, so as to throw the light as much forward as possible, thus to give him prompt warning of the presence of danger. Dorval was now walking by his side, as if resolved at least to share, if not to be the first encounter, whatsoever peril (if any) there might be to meet: but all still continued silent. Tunar could not help a cold shuddering sensation creeping over him as he knew that he was drawing nearer and nearer to the spot where his hand had encountered the slimy folds of an immense coiled-up snake; and he dreaded lest at any moment the terrible hissing of an aroused reptile should burst upon his ear. But still all was silent.

And now, at the extremity of the remaining vista of gloom in that cavern, a large dark object began slowly to develop itself. It seemed to be a colossal form of female shape; for the cavern, though growing narrower and narrower, still retained its average height, which was about ten feet.

"Do you behold nothing?"

asked Tunar, in a low half-hushed voice, the accents of which were tremulous despite all his efforts to speak composedly and to maintain the semblance of courage.

"Yes—I behold an object which is evidently a colossal statue," responded Dorval, whose voice was completely composed.

"A statue?" ejaculated Tunar, considerably reassured, and his first feeling of terror suddenly subsiding.

"Yes," continued Dorval, "it is the statue of a female. And now that I view it more closely, it is the statue of Eve. Ah! and now behold, Tunar!—there is the serpent!"

"The serpent?"—and a cold shudder swept through the youth's form.

"Yes—a serpent," rejoined the sedate philosophic Frenchman, "formed of the same material as the statue itself—and both, I believe, are of stone."

And it was so. There, at the extremity of the cavern, stood a colossal statue of the Mother of Mankind, naked, as she was prior to the sin which caused the fall of her husband and herself. The statue stood upon a pedestal of considerable dimensions and about five feet high,—the serpent being so sculptured that while its head and neck were erect as if the reptile were conversing with Eve, the huge coils of the remainder of its length stood out in bold relief from the pedestal, its tail reaching almost to the ground. Upon the whole mass of sculpture the damp had collected with a greenish hue and with a slimy touch; so that it was no wonder Tunar had fancied, in the suddenly excited horror of his feelings, that his hand had come

in contact with a veritable living snake.

Dorval contemplated this magnificent work of art with the admiration of an intelligent mind mingled with those solemn feelings of awe which could not fail to take possession of the true Christian believer. But when Tunar had surveyed the same object for a brief space, he hastened to look behind the statue, to see if there were any doorway or entrance into the Vale of Gulistan: for now that his fears in respect to the huge serpent were completely relieved, he was impatient to penetrate into the Valley of Roses. He beheld no sign of a door: he took the lamp and examined the closing wall of rock; but no indication of a door did he perceive—no means of proceeding a step farther. The statue stood about a yard away from the extremity of the cavern, so that Tunar could pass behind it; but that extremity exactly corresponded in its ruggedness and unevenness with the other walls of the subterranean. Into every nook and cranny did the youth peep—but still fruitlessly. He took his stout stick, and beat everywhere against the extremity of the cavern in the hope that some hollow sound would disclose the whereabouts of a secretly contrived door. But no!—the staff fell everywhere with the dead heavy noise which denoted the solid massiveness of the rugged wall of the rock against which it beat. Then Tunar examined the ground along the extremity of the cavern in the vicinity of the statue, in the hope of discovering the indications of a trap-door—but still all in vain.

While he was thus employed the light of the lamp which he held in his hand flung its beams in various directions upon the colossal piece of sculpture, according to the movements of the youth himself as he bore that light. And all the while Count Dorval, with arms folded composedly over his breast was surveying that work of art admiringly and reverentially,—examining its various details according as they were developed by the way in which the beams of the lamp fell upon the statue.

At length Tunar, disappointed and irritable at his fruitless search, turned towards the old man, abruptly exclaiming, "You would do well to assist me instead of remaining idle there!"

"How often am I to reprove you for want of patience, for petulance, and for forming hasty judgments?" asked Dorval, in a tone of severer rebuke than he had ever yet adopted. "At the moment when you hope to enter a vale of heavenly peace—a terrestrial elysium of celestial beatitude—you bring to its very threshold all the weaknesses of those earthly feelings whereof you ought carefully to have purged your soul."

The youth—who by this time was well acquainted with Dorval's character—knew that the admonition just administered was a prelude to some fresh display of the old man's sagacity; and once more assuming an air of meekness and humility, Tunar said, "Oh, forgive me, my dear friend! It is the last time I will ever anger you with my hastiness or petulance!"

"If I have been contemplating this statue with attention," continued Dorval, "it was not without

a motive. I have borne in mind the evidences of all that jealous care with which the means of access to the Vale of Gulistan are shrouded and concealed. Not for an instant, therefore, would I abandon myself to the vulgar stupid idea that at the extremity of this cavern we should find a door set in the wall of rock and ready to be opened by any hand that might be outstretched for the purpose. No! I have been looking elsewhere to discover the mystery which veils the entrance into the Valley of Gulistan."

"Ah! the statue?" ejaculated Tunar as an idea suddenly struck him from the old man's suggestive words.

"Yes, the statue, responded Dorval. "Now let us conceive that we ourselves were the first possessors of the secret of Gulistan, and that we were adopting every precaution to shield its discovery against all strangers or common intruders. We should say to ourselves that an accident might reveal the sloping ledge-like pathway on the other side of the ravine. We should next say to ourselves that anyone who chanced to discover that pathway, might descend into the ravine—might cross the bridge over the torrent—might ascend the winding path leading up to this cavern—and might penetrate into the depths of the cavern to the very point where we now stand. Then, is it probable that we should leave the remainder of the route into the Valley itself so easy of discovery that the chance-led individual who had penetrated thus far had only to look with a little keenness about him in order to discern a door in the wall

of rock or a trap-door in the ground? We should scarcely be so unguarded, so incautious, or so insensate. Then what should we do? We should place on this very spot an altar—or a statue—or some sacred emblem—perhaps even a tomb—so that the chance-led individual might exclaim, ‘*AH THERE IS THE SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY TO WHICH ALL THESE CUNNINGLY CONCEALED PATHWAYS LEAD!*’ And then he would retrace his way, vexed with himself for having lost his time in penetrating, as he would think, a mystery which had produced him no particle of benefit.”

“Yes—I comprehend!” said Tunar, again overawed by the superior sagacity of his venerable companion. “But you conjecture—”

“Let me continue my observations in my own way,” interrupted Dorval. I am supposing we were the first possessors of the wondrous secret of Gulistan; and I have shown you how we should have placed upon this spot an altar, a mausoleum, or a statue, to shield the very secret itself from the knowledge of the casual, accidental, or hazard-led intruder. Well, then, there is a statue here! Let us suppose that we placed it on this spot. Would not our object be twofold?—first of all for the purpose I have already explained of misleading and blinding the chance-led individual—and secondly to shut up as it were within its own self the secret we sought to conceal. Tunar,” added the old man, extending his hand towards the statue and speaking in the impressive tone of confidence, “*there is the entrance into the Vale of Gulistan!*”

“Oh, how wondrous is your sagacity!” exclaimed the admiring Tunar: “how marvellous your prescience! It is omniscience itself!”

“Blaspheme not, boy!” said Dorval, sternly. I am but a poor wretched mortal like yourself: and would you give to me an attribute of the Divinity? Beware, lest for all your errors of mind and temper it never be given unto thee to enter into the Vale of Gulistan!”

But Tunar heard not that speech which commenced in rebuke and ended in warning. He had already placed the lamp upon a conveniently projecting piece of the sculptured pedestal, which represented a mound covered with fruits and flowers, on which Eve was standing, and up which the serpent had coiled itself. Yes—Tunar had so placed the lamp: and he was already searching about in every direction to discover a secret spring or the indications of a door in the pedestal of the statue. Suddenly the whole front of the pedestal was thrown open—opening indeed in the form of a door, as it was; and a dusky-complexioned female made her appearance.

“Ah! strangers!” she ejaculated, in sudden alarm, as the light flashed upon her eyes, showing her two human forms. “What! Tunar?”

“Klodissa!” cried the youth.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, a dagger flashed in Klodissa’s hand, and a quick blow was aimed at Tunar’s heart. But suddenly inspired with the fury of a hyena, Tunar caught Kodissa’s wrist: he wrenched the dagger from her hand, and he plunged it into her form before Dorval could possibly arrest

his arm. Klodissa fell with a moan upon the ground; and Tunar, with a wild cry of joy and triumph, rushed down the steps which the open door of the pedestal revealed. The door instantaneously closed behind him with a low and scarcely audible sound.

With a feeling of unutterable horror at this tragic scene which had so rapidly taken place, Count Dorval hastened to raise Klodissa in his arms. He drew forth the dagger which Tunar had left in the wound, where it had penetrated beneath her left bosom. The blood gushed forth in a torrent; and Dorval tore open her vesture to stanch it. The lamp was still burning on the pedestal: Klodissa was totally insensible.

With a portion of her linen, torn away with her now disordered dress, Dorval was about to stanch the wound, when an ejaculation of amazement burst from his lips; for whereas Klodissa's countenance, neck, and bust were all of swarthy hue, yet below the bared bosom her skin was of purest alabaster whiteness!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SULTAN'S ILLNESS.

THE reader will bear in mind that our tale opened in the middle of the summer of 1853, and that all the incidents hitherto recorded have spread themselves over a period of about six months—consequently occupying the whole of the second half of that year. It was a period full of omen and portent for Europe, the period in which the earliest struggles of the war commenced between Russia

and Turkey. France and England, though entirely favourable to the Sultan, had not as yet proclaimed war on his behalf: but the thunder of battle, rolling along the entire line of the Danube, had reverberated through Europe. The Russians had invaded the Danubian Principalities, and seemed inclined to pour their legions into Bulgaria, perhaps ultimately to threaten Constantinople. But it was destined for the Power which was so proud in its menace to be humiliated by the Power it sought to coerce: it was written in the book of heaven that the Ottomans, though deemed weak, should rise like giants in the plenitude of their strength, and that a man should appear to inscribe the names of great victories upon the standard of the Crescent. That man was Omar Pasha; and the brilliant victory of Ottenitza had already excited the utmost enthusiasm throughout Europe.

The period of which we are writing had, however, proved a most harassing one for the Sultan Abdul Medjid. Only in his thirtieth year, and consequently quite a young man, the Ottoman monarch had suddenly found himself called upon to play a most conspicuous part upon the theatre of the world. He devoted himself to business—he bestowed every attention upon the affairs of his empire—he held frequent consultations with his Ministers—presided at Divans—and constantly received the ambassadors of friendly Powers. So much labour naturally produced its effect upon a constitution which was by no means strong; and towards the close of the year the Sultan was seized with a severe

indisposition. It was dreaded lest he should altogether succumb to this malady which had attacked him; and his mother the Sultana-Valida, who had loved her son dearly, was reduced almost to despair. The two imperial physicians—those, be it remembered, who were before mentioned in respect to Leila's trance and Thekla's box of drugs—were most assiduous in their attentions towards the Sultan. Sometimes their prescriptions would appear to be efficacious; their imperial patient would rise from his couch and seeming to be full of energy, would repair to his private cabinet to grant an audience to his Grand Vizier or to look over State documents. But in the midst of these occupations a faintness would seize upon him—illness would prostrate him again—and he would be borne to his couch, apparently in a dying state. These relapses had on several occasions happened: but still the Sultan would not take warning therefrom and allow himself sufficient time to regain the amount of energy which was requisite for the duties of his imperial office.

The Sultana-Valida began at length to doubt the skill of the two physicians to whom the life of her son was confined. She accordingly requested that the medical attendants attached to the British and French embassies might be suffered to hold a consultation with the two Ottoman physicians. The consultation took place: and the result was that the French and English medical men entirely approved of the whole course of treatment to which the Sultan had been subjected; and while they deplored those intervals of excitement

which impelled his Imperial Majesty to devote a premature attention to public affairs, thereby overtaking the little energy which remained to him, they considered that the seeds of disease were already so deeply implanted in his constitution that his recovery could only be effected by a miracle.

It was in the forenoon of a dull gloomy day in the middle of December when the results of the consultation were announced to the Sultana-Valida. Her Imperial Highness, overwhelmed with grief, shut herself up in her own apartment—more with the hope of being enabled to resign herself to the decrees of destiny, than to deliberate upon any means of affording succour to the beloved son who seemed perishing before her eyes. Indeed, she was reduced to despair; and all hope was gone. Her cold nature was melting beneath the fever-heat of grief; and the tears flowed copiously from her eyes. While she was thus seated in her own apartment, from which she had dismissed her attendants, the door opened—and a lady glided softly in. This was Tarkhana, the daughter of the Georgian widow and one of the favourites of the invalid Sultan.

"Pardon me, Highness, for this intrusion," said Tarkhana: "but I learnt that you were alone—I have heard the results of the consultation—I judged how great the distress of your mind must be—and I have ventured to come hither, in the hope that we may blend our tears, and that my sympathy may not be altogether unacceptable."

The Sultana-Valida shook her head despairingly, and endeavoured

to speak a few words; but grief choked her utterance.

"Surely, surely," continued Tarkhana, "all hope cannot be utterly extinct?"

"Our own physicians," replied the Sultana-Valida now speaking in broken accents, "are powerless to struggle against the malady which has seized upon my imperial son; and the Christian physicians can accomplish naught on his behalf. It seems as if he were past all human succour."

"Were it permitted to one so humble as I am," said Tarkhana, meekly, and yet with a certain degree of anxious earnestness, "I would proffer a suggestion."

"Ah! is it so?" ejaculated the mother of the Sultan, catching at the word *suggestion* as if it were synonymous with *hope*. "You are not humble—and therefore you may speak in reference to things which concern his Imperial Majesty. Are you not a Sultana? Are you not a favourite with my son? Are you not the mother of a princess? Speak, therefore!"

"There is within these walls—languishing in captivity apparently forgotten by your Highness, who consigned her to that prisonage—a woman of no ordinary skill——"

"Ah, I recollect!" said the Sultana-Valida: "you allude to Thekla? On two or three former occasions have you mentioned her name to me——"

"And your Highness promised," rejoined Tarkhana, "that Thekla should not continue forgotten—but still she has been forgotten!"

"No—not altogether forgotten," replied the Sultana-Valida: "but the physicians have assured me that she was an impostress—and I

have been ashamed of myself for having allowed my mind in a moment of weakness and of silly curiosity to be influenced by her empirical jargon. When some months back she stood in my presence. She ought to be thankful to me for having suffered her to retain her life after being convicted of aiding in the escape of the Favourite of the Ramazan."

"And yet, Highness," urged Tarkhana, "it was no fiction nor delusion, no cheat nor imposture, that by her skill she was enabled to throw the Favourite of the Ramazan into a trance resembling death, and then subsequently to bring her back to life."

"True!" said the Sultana-Valida; "and full well do I remember how anxious at the time I was to obtain an insight into this woman's secret, and learn the nature of the drug, potion, cordial, or whatsoever it was, which brought Leila back to life."

"And did not Thekla tell your Highness that she was the daughter of that celebrated physician Ahmed Arslan, who in the time of the plague effected such wondrous cures?"

"True!" again cried the Sultana-Valida: "all this I had forgotten—for I suffered the physicians to prejudice my mind against her. But you, Tarkhana, have been more thoughtful; for on three or four occasions you have interceded with me on Thekla's behalf——"

"And if I did not on those occasions press the subject," observed Tarkhana, "it was because I perceived that it was distasteful to your Highness."

"You have inspired me with some hope," said the mother of the

Sultan. "We will see this Thekla—we will hear whether she considers herself competent to deal with the malady of my august son?"

Tarkhana could scarcely conceal her joy at this decision. She had with grief witnessed the continued captivity of Thekla, for some months past, within the walls of the imperial palace: she had interceded with Sultana-Valida so far as she had dared; but she had dreaded to appear too urgent, lest it should be suspected that she was not altogether so completely unconnected with the plot which had rescued the Star of Mingrelia, as it was her interest to seem. The imperial physicians, knowing how probable it was that Thekla as the celebrated Ahmed Arslan's daughter, might possess important secrets—a proof of which had indeed been furnished in the case of Leila—trembled lest their own reputation should be eclipsed by the wise-woman; and thus they had insidiously wrought upon the mind of the Sultana-Valida to destroy her confidence in Thekla. The Sultana would not however take any decisive step in reference to Thekla, either by condemning her to death or to imprisonment in the Castle of the Seven Towers: but she had retained her a captive in the palace, constantly postponing through various circumstances the pronouncement of any definite sentence. Indeed Thekla had for months past been well nigh forgotten by the Sultan's mother, save and except on the few occasions when Tarkhana had ventured to intercede in her behalf; and then her Imperial Highness had cut Tarkhana short by some vague

promise, so that the topic could not be continued. The truth was that until the day of which we are now writing, that topic had been a sore one with the Sultana-Valida; for her pride was wounded by the idea that she had for a moment abandoned herself to what the physicians had since assured her was naught but the empirical jargon of an impostress. Now, however, her Imperial Highness, driven to despair by her beloved son's condition, was ready to clutch at any straw of hope which might present itself; and thus the intercession of Tarkhana on Thekla's behalf at length produced its effect.

The Kiskar-Aga was summoned; and on entering into the presence of the Sultan's mother and Tarkhana, the sable official made a low obeisance.

"Is the woman Thekla still in safe custody?" at once inquired the Sultana-Valida.

"She is, most gracious Highness," responded the Kiskar-Aga, "The mandates of your Highness have been fully carried out."

"And she has been well treated," asked the Sultana, "in all respects save with regard to her freedom?"

The Kiskar-Aga responded in the affirmative.

"Let her be brought into my presence," said the Sultana-Valida.

The Kiskar-Aga bowed and withdrew. In a few minutes he reappeared, accompanied by Thekla whose naturally pale countenance was perhaps somewhat more pallid than it was wont to be previous to her captivity—but who in other respects had a calm and composed demeanour. As she entered the apartment, Tarkhana flung upon her a look of friendly recognition;

but so rapid was this look that it escaped the notice alike of the Sultana-Valida and the Kiskar-Aga.

"Woman," said the mother of the Sultan, now resuming that glacial dignity which she deemed most consistent with her rank and high position, "you perhaps deem that I have dealt harshly by you?"

"If your Highness," responded Thekla, "were to insist that I should specify my case of complaint, I should be compelled to declare that your Highness broke the compact which you formed with me some months back."

A slight flush of haughty indignation passed over the usually pale but still handsome countenance of the Sultana-Mother; and then conquering the angry feeling which had arisen within her, she said with her wonted sedate dignity, "And that compact—what was it? I have almost forgotten it."

"Your Highness sought from my lips the revelation of the secret of that precious compound which has a sovereign power when dealing with severe maladies, or with the trance that resembles death. This elixir of mine," continued Thekla, "was to have been put to the test. If it failed, death in the waters of the Bishporus was to have been my portion; but if it succeeded, I was to be restored to freedom and to be enriched. For riches I craved not. If I coveted wealth, the exercise of my skill would procure it. But my freedom I value;—and if your Highness had adhered to your compact, I should have long ago been in the enjoyment of liberty."

"It is not for princesses," said the Sultana-Valida, "to offer excuses to those who are as the dust

beneath their feet: but if I have dealt harshly and wrongly with you, Thekla, I am assuredly grieved. Nay, more—I will confess that my mind has been prejudiced against you; and for months past I have viewed with indifference if not with positive incredulity, those promises on your part which in the first instance inspired me with curiosity and interest. More than this cannot be spoken from the lips of one of my rank and position. But now answer me—are you still willing to adhere to the compact?"

"I am still willing," responded Thekla. "But first of all may I inquire of your Highness by whom your imperial mind was prejudiced against me, and who dared in the face of facts to denounce me as an empiric and an impostress?"

The Sultana-Valida reflected for a few moments, until she arrived at the conclusion that there could be no possible harm in satisfying this wise-woman's curiosity on the point. Indeed, her Imperial Highness was now anxious to conciliate Thekla; and she accordingly said, "The two imperial physicians gave me their opinion upon what they termed your pretensions. I believed this opinion to be honest and conscientious; for they examined the box of drugs which belonged to you."

"And because they themselves were ignorant of many things," observed Thekla, her thin pale lips smiling scornfully for a moment, "they denounced me as even still more ignorant than themselves! Under these circumstances what chance shall I now have in putting my elixir to a fair test?"

"Name your own terms—specify your own conditions," replied the

Sultana, "and they shall be assented to. What test do you propose?"

Thekla did not immediately answer: but fixing her eyes upon the Sultana Mother, she regarded her with a solemn attention for nearly a minute. Then at length she said, "His Imperial Majesty the Sultan is perishing rapidly: but I can restore him to the full vigour and enjoyment of existence!"

"Will you undertake this? will you pledge yourself to such a task?" exclaimed the Sultana-Mother, forgetting her sedate dignity in the suddenly excited hopefulness which seized upon her.

"I will," responded Thekla, firmly, and with a look full of confidence.

"Ah! but—I mean not to wound your feelings," said the Sultana.—"I am incapable of condescending to an insult!—Yet remember that it is the life of your Sovereign which you demand as the test of this elixir of yours!"

"I know it," rejoined Thekla. "Your Imperial Highness is still full of mistrust and suspicion; and perhaps you deem it possible that I am some secret foe of your august son, or the instrument of others who are the foes of His Imperial Majesty? Perhaps you think that under the pretext of saving I am capable of killing—and that instead of administering a healthful potion, I may present a poisoned draught? But I will convince your Highness of my good faith."

"I do not say that I mistrust you," replied the Sultana-Mother; "and yet will I accept the proof which you offer me. Proceed!—there is no time to be lost!"

"Suffer my box of drugs to be re-

stored to me," said Thekla; "and command the two imperial physicians to attend here in the presence of your Highness."

"All shall be done as you require," rejoined the Sultana Valida: and the mandate was issued accordingly.

In a few minutes the elder of the two imperial physicians made his appearance; and for a moment his countenance changed somewhat on beholding Thekla. But quickly recovering his self-possession, he made a low obeisance to the Sultan's mother and to Tarkhana, and proceeded to apologize for the non-attendance of his colleague the junior physician, whom he had left in attendance upon the Sultan; for his Imperial Majesty was then wrapped in slumber in his own apartment.

"Do you require the presence of both physicians?" demanded the Sultana-Valida of Thekla.

"No, Highness," replied the wise-woman; "the presence of this one will suffice."

The Kislar-Aga now made his appearance with Thekla's box of drugs, which had been for a long time past in his care; and the wise woman's countenance expressed for a moment a feeling of satisfaction as if she had thus recovered an object that was dear to her.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE PORCELAIN CUP.

THE imperial physician again experienced considerable difficulty in concealing his uneasiness. He was in reality a man of great skill and talent: but he had that meanness of mind which could

not endure the idea of rivalry. The Sultana-Valida no longer thought it necessary to assume her wonted demeanour of cold stateliness: she suffered her natural emotions to take their legitimate course; and she accordingly exhibited much suspense and curiosity in respect to the proceedings, whatsoever they were, on which Thekla was about to enter. Tarkhana was likewise an interested witness; for she had the welfare of Thekla at heart on account of all that the wise-woman had done for Leila; and she moreover hoped that through Thekla's agency the Sultan would be restored to health. For though Tarkhana loved not Abdul Medjid in the true sense of the term—and though she never could forget her native home, her family, and her Georgian lover, nor the manner in which she had been torn away from them all to become the Favourite of the Ramadan—yet she felt deeply grateful to the Sultan for all the kindnesses and proofs of love and friendship which he had studied to lavish upon her.

In addition to the personages whom we have already named as being interested in the proceedings on which the wise-woman was about to enter, we must mention the Kishar-Aga, who was also present—and who being devoted to the Sultan, sincerely hoped that Thekla's skill might in the long run prove salutary to his Imperial Majesty.

Depositing her box upon a table Thekla opened it; and she ran her eyes rapidly over its contents to mark whether any articles of importance had been abstracted. The survey seemed to be satisfactory;

and she took forth a little porcelain cup of fairy dimensions—indeed not larger than one of the exquisitely delicate coffee-cups which are generally used in Turkey, and which are not much larger than English egg-cups. The painting or staining of this little porcelain cup represented wreaths of flowers of very vivid colours and beautifully executed—the principal hues being blue and crimson. Thekla placed the cup on the top of a table ornament, so that it now stood about two feet higher than the table itself; and in this position it was all the more convenient for the inspection of the witnesses according to the purpose which Thekla had in view.

"Your Imperial Highness," said Thekla, addressing herself in this direct manner to the Sultana-Valida, as the principal personage present, "Will graciously condescend to observe this cup with the minutest attention. Your Highness beholds the flowers forming the pattern of the porcelain. Observe how deep yet clear is this blue—how vivid this crimson—how bright this green—how golden this yellow! Your Highness will likewise notice that the cup is entirely transparent; and if you look within the little cup, the traces of the flowers and leaves on the outside can be clearly distinguished through the porcelain."

"It is a beautiful little specimen of porcelain," said the Sultana-Valida: but she looked as if she were wondering what on earth it could have to do with the test to which Thekla had offered to put her sincerity before being suffered to apply the still

more important test of her skill to the invalid state of the Sultan.

"And your Excellency also observes the peculiar vividness of these colours?" continued the wise-woman, now addressing herself to the physician.

"They are very beautiful, doubtless," responded that functionary, but with a certain contemptuousness of look and tone, as much as to imply that it was only some piece of wretched jugglery which he had been summoned to contemplate.

"Your Excellency will now be good enough to look into that box," proceeded Thekla, "and to take forth thence the most deadly poison which you can find. Start not, Highness, at the word poison!" added the wise-woman, turning to the Sultana-Valida; "for this learned physician will inform you that many drugs when administered in small quantities to heal and to cure, would, if largely administered, prove the most virulent poison."

"Yes—now that I bethink me, I have heard of this before," said the Sultana-Mother.

Meanwhile the physician had been searching in the box; and taking forth a small phial containing a white powder, he said, "Let your experiment, whatsoever it is, be made with this."

Thekla took the phial and emptied forth a quantity of the powder into the cup. She then poured in some water from a crystal jug which stood upon the table; and she stirred up the contents of the little cup with a small stick of glass which she took from her box.

"This is a deadly poison, your

Highness, as the physician has given you to understand," said Thekla. "Watch the colours on the porcelain cup."

The spectators of this singular scene riveted their eyes upon the cup; and it appeared to them as if the colours forming the wreaths of flowers lost their vividness and their brightness and grew paler and paler. For the first few moments the two Sultanas, the physician, and the Kiskar-Aga thought that it was an optical delusion: they simultaneously passed their hands across their eyes—and then they all looked again. It was no deception—no delusion! The colours had faded, until they had become so faint as to be only dimly perceptible; while the porcelain itself, instead of remaining transparent, had at first grown dull and cloudy and then entirely opaque. Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of the two Sultanas: the physician looked dubious as to what might be the object of all this—for he knew not that it was a test of Thekla's good faith prior to her being permitted to put her skill to another test. As to the Kiskar-Aga, he gazed open-mouthed in bewildered admiration.

"Now witness the contrary effect," said the wise-woman, taking the little porcelain cup and emptying its contents into some china ornament which was handy upon the table.

She replaced the cup in its former position: and all eyes were again riveted upon it. Gradually and gradually the colours came back, while the opaqueness as gradually yielded to the pristine transparency of the porcelain. The crimson, the blue, the green, and

the yellow regained all their vividness, until they were at length seen as plainly as at first in their bright but delicate tracery; and when the eye looked inside the cup, that tracery could be discerned through its diaphanous thickness.

Thekla desired the physician to select another poison from the box, and he said, "This time I will, with your permission, choose the weakest of that species of drug which I may here find."

"Do so," rejoined Thekla; "and you will then have had proof of the effects produced upon the cup, alike by the most potent and by the most feeble of poisons."

When this second poison was mixed with water in the cup, the colours began to grow dim more slowly than in the former instance and they did not pale away altogether, but merely sank into a certain degree of faintness—while the transparency of the porcelain was only proportionately clouded into a semi-opaqueness. When the cup was emptied of its contents, the colours returned gradually to their pristine brightness, and the porcelain itself to its transparency.

"Inshallah! this is wonderful!" ejaculated the Sultana-Valida.

"And the experiments are as interesting and beautiful as they are marvellous," said Taikhana.

"May it please your Imperial Highness," observed the Kiskar-Aga, "this is indeed a wise-woman—and she knows many things!"

"I remember," said the physician, "to have read of such cups as these in the pages of some romance; but I had never dreamt that they possessed any real existence. Yet, after all, the

porcelain when in a state of preparation in the potter's hands, may be mixed with certain salts calculated to be acted upon in this manner by particular poisons; and the colours might be painted with ingredients which acknowledge a similar influence."

"Test this cup," said Thekla, "with whatsoever poisons you will—and the results shall prove the same."

"You have no strychnine in this box of yours," said the physician, "nor brucine; and there are many other poisons used for medical purposes, of which perhaps you, my good woman, are utterly ignorant."

"Does your Excellency possess those medicaments?" inquired Thekla.

"I do," was the response.

"Then by all means test the cup therewith," rejoined the wise-woman.

The physician bowed to the Sultana-Valida, and issued from the apartment. In a few minutes he returned, bearing a small but elegantly appointed medicine chest—from which he took one of the potent poisons that he had named. The effect was the same as with Thekla's first experiment,—the colours altogether disappearing, or rather fading into dimness, and the porcelain itself becoming densely opaque. The physician—who perceived the influence that the wise-woman was gaining over the Sultana—was resolved to repeat and prolong his tests, in the hope that the cup would presently fail to become a faithful betrayer of the presence of poison: but the results were always such as to maintain the credit of Thekla's medium.

Finally, it was evident that as a test this cup was infallible.

"And now," said Thekla, "it remains for me to convince your Imperial Highness that drugs which contain no poison produce not the slightest effect upon the hues of transparency of the cup."

These tests were likewise accomplished; and everything resulted according to the assurance of the wise-woman.

"Your Highness can now keep this cup in your own possession for the present," said Thekla; "so that you may have the certainty that I shall in no way tamper with it. With the permission of your Highness I will hasten to prepare the elixir which may give back health and strength to our august Sultan."

"Allah! Allah!" ejaculated the physician; "is this woman mad that she thinks because her feats of jugglery have proved successful, she is to be entrusted with aught that regards the precious life of our beloved monarch?"

"Your Excellency will be pleased to submit to my will in this matter," said the Sultana-Valida, in a voice of dignified command. "Your Excellency can now retire; but I charge you, breathe not to a living soul a single syllable descriptive of what you have heard or seen in this room. Such is my mandate:—see that you obey it."

The discomfited physician dared not utter a word of remonstrance, nor even yet bend a remonstrating look upon her Imperial Highness; but with a low obeisance he retired from the apartment.

"Now, Thekla," said the Sultana-Valida, "what do you require for the compounding of your elixir?"

"I require permission to descend into the garden of the palace, to obtain whatsoever plants and roots I may need, and to range likewise through the conservatories in search of particular flowers."

"And what space of time will you require for the making of this precious elixir?"

"I cannot possibly be prepared with it," responded the wise-woman, "before the hour of noon to-morrow."

"The hour of noon to-morrow!" repeated the Sultana-Valida, with a profound sigh: "it is a long time to wait!—a long time to endure suspense! But if there be no alternative——"

"There is none, Highness," answered Thekla: then after a pause, she added emphatically, "And if ever I devoted care to the task, it shall assuredly be bestowed upon the present occasion."

The wise-woman now withdrew from the apartment, in company with the Kiskar-Aga, and in possession of the box of drugs: but the Sultana-Valida retained the beautiful little porcelain cup. Thekla was conducted into the spacious gardens belonging to the harem department of the Seraglio; and there she found all the roots, the plants, and the flowers which she required. Returning to her own chamber, she shut herself in, with the request that she might not be intruded upon until the hour of noon on the morrow. The Kiskar-Aga faithfully promised that her wish should be complied with; and Thekla was left alone with the requisite materials for the elimination and compounding of the ingredients that were to form the sovereign elixir.

The Sultana-Valida was now full of anxious hope and suspense. She deliberated with herself whether she should inform her son the Sultan of all that was in progress, or whether she should administer the elixir in his sleep. She however decided upon acquainting him with everything, and beseeching him to have faith in the wise-woman; for she did not choose to incur the awful responsibility that would arise from failure and death. She however postponed the announcement to her son until the following day,—her Highness being well aware that the physician would not venture to breathe a syllable on the subject after the authoritative injunction she had given him to that effect.

On this point the Sultana-Valida was right in her calculation: the physician held his tongue. But he did not the less dread the consequences of Thekla's probable success,—a success which, if achieved, would throw a complete shade over the skill, the character, and repute of himself and his colleague. He therefore shut himself up for two or three hours in his own apartment, consulted his books, and racked his brain to discover some medicament which might effectually revive the Sultan's failing energies. He at length resolved upon the mode of treatment which he should adopt, and which involved a total change in the medicines administered to the imperial patient. With the utmost care the physician compounded a potion, a moiety of which he administered to the Sultan in the evening and the remainder at a very early hour in the morning.

At about nine o'clock on that morning the Sultan rose from his couch, declaring that he felt better than he had done for a long time past; and the two physicians were delighted—especially the senior, for the reasons already known to the reader. The Sultan sent to inform his mother of the improved state of his health; and her Highness was likewise told that his Imperial Majesty purposed to grant an audience to his Grand Vizier, after which he would pay his respects to his mother in her own apartment. The Sultana-Valida was cheered on receiving such tidings; though she could not help thinking that this temporary return of energy would be followed by a relapse, as on several former occasions; and she did not therefore send to Thekla's apartment to bid her discontinue the process of compounding the elixir. Meanwhile the senior physician was busily engaged in brewing another bottle of his own medicine, in the hope that it would have the effect of staying off that reaction which the Sultana-Valida dreaded on behalf of her son.

The Sultan—apparelled in his splendid uniform, made in the European style—granted the audience to the Grand Vizier, who congratulated his Sovereign on the improved state of his health. It was now past eleven o'clock in the forenoon; and the audience was about to terminate, when a messenger arrived with despatches from Omar Pasha. Therein the Generalissimo of the Ottoman army announced fresh successes on the line of the Danube; and the enthusiasm of the Sultan on behalf of his General and his troops

was excited to the highest degree. All of a sudden a faintness came over him—the moment of reaction had come—he was overpowered by his joy—and he sank back on his throne in a state of insensibility.

Abdel Medjid was at once borne to his chamber: and the Sultana-Valida was instantaneously sent for, according to positive orders which her august son's attendants had received in respect to these occasions of alarming crisis. The physicians were about to administer their potion; but the Sultana-Valida peremptorily commanded them to quit the chamber, together with all others who were present, with the exception of two black slaves holding high offices in the domestic department of the Sultan's household.

To these two slaves the Sultana-Valida's instructions were speedily given; and they glided by a private door from the apartment. In a few minutes they reappeared, ushering in Thekla: but one of those slaves had now a silken bowstring—dread emblem and warning in that palace!—hanging over his arm.

CHAPTER L.

THE TEST OF THE ELIXIR.

[T was now precisely the hour of noon; and the chants of the muezzins summoning the Faithful to prayer were resounding from the minaret of every mosque in Constantinople. It was therefore the exact time at which Thekla on the preceding day, had promised to be prepared with her sovereign elixir; and it almost seemed as if heaven had so willed it that the

Sultan should be brought at this very hour to the most dangerous crisis his malady had yet sustained, in order that the skill of the wise-woman might be put to the test. The two black slaves of the imperial household, to whom the Sultana-Valida's instructions were given, had proceeded to Thekla's chamber; and on knocking at the door, were at once admitted. They inquired if she was prepared with the elixir?—and she answered in the affirmative, at the same time producing a small phial, which she handed to them. She was then forthwith conducted to the apartment in which the Sultan lay, and where the Sultana-Valida was anxiously awaiting her presence; but during the passage thither, through the long corridors of the palace, one of the slaves took from beneath his garments the ominous bowstring which was so dread a symbol within the walls of that imperial dwelling. The wise-woman beheld it and comprehended its significancy. For an instant her countenance flushed with indignation at the menace thereby conveyed: but quickly regaining her self-possession, she appeared placid, tranquil, and self-confident as before.

She now found herself in a magnificently furnished apartment, where the Sultan lay sleeping upon a couch, with the Sultana-Valida bending anxiously over him. There he lay, in his brilliant uniform, just as he had been brought from the throne-room where he had received his Grand Vizier: for the Sultana-Valida had determined that in no way should he be disturbed until Thekla arrived to give her instructions. A superb

coverlid of velvet, embroidered with gold, was thrown partly over the recumbent form; and the countenance of the imperial sleeper was pale as death.

When Thekla was introduced to this apartment in the manner already described, one of the black slaves presented the phial to the Sultana-Valida; and her Highness said to the wise-woman, "Is this the elixir?"

"It is," responded Thekla. "At the moment which I yesterday specified for to day, was I prepared."

"You already believe," continued the Sultana-Valida, "that you have experienced harsh treatment within these walls; and the treatment which you are *now* experiencing may appear even harsher still. But you must recollect that an awful responsibility now rests upon my head. There lies my son, the Sovereign of the Ottomans—their ruler—their hope—and their refuge! To him am I about to administer the medicine of your compounding; and this step I am taking without the assent or advice of the two imperial physicians. If my beloved son shall be restored to life and health by these means—which Allah in his goodness grant!—I may afterwards glorify myself for having yielded my confidence unto you. All will then be well—and my eternal gratitude will be your due."

Here the Sultana-Valida, who had been speaking in a low hurried tone, paused for a few moments, as if she expected that the wise-woman might give some answer or make some comment. But Thekla saw that her Imperial Highness had yet more to say;

and she therefore held her peace until the full announcement should be made.

"Yes," continued the Sultana-Valida, "an awful weight of responsibility rests upon my head. For if—and circumstances compel me to speak plainly—for if you are not altogether what you seem—if beneath fair words treacherous intentions lurk—if, in short, death should ensue from the course about to be adopted—and if that death should be proved to result from poison, the most terrible accusations would be levelled against myself. The physicians would denounce me—the guards and menials of the palace would seize upon me—the whole city would rise in rage and indignation—and my life would not be worth an hour's purchase. Now, Thekla, do you comprehend all this?"

"Your Highness speaks plainly," answered the wise-woman, unflinchingly meeting the keen gaze fixed upon her by the Sultana's large dark eyes; "and therefore I comprehend everything to which you have given utterance."

"And you cannot be surprised at the course of seeming harshness which I am adopting towards yourself," continued the Sultana-Valida. "Hear, then, while I explain the rest in a few words. There lies my son!—and here is your elixir! If it prove efficacious as a restorative, according to your promise, there is no boon which you can demand too great for him or me to bestow. But if, on the other hand, he perish before my eyes and the breath of life should go out of him,—*then* is your own fate sealed!"—and the Sultana

pointed significantly to the bow-string which hung over the arm of one of the black slaves.

"Be it so," responded Thekla, in her usual quiet tone. "Your Highness has the porcelain cup; and it will show whether that elixir be noxious or wholesome. As your Highness was informed yesterday there are medicines into which mineral or vegetable poison enters as a necessary ingredient; and yet they prove not poisonous, but salutary to the human constitution. But in *that* elixir which you hold in your hand, there is not the slightest particle of a poisonous element. Again, I say, you have the porcelain cup—and you know the extent of its testing powers."

"If the result shall prove favourable, Thekla," rejoined the Sultana-Valida, "I will embrace you as if you were a sister—and there shall be no limit to the proofs of my gratitude. But if on the other hand the result be unfavourable, your minutes in this life are assuredly numbered!"

"Proceed, Highness, to administer the elixir," said the wise-woman glancing towards the countenance of the sleeping Sultan: "for I see that you have no time to lose!"

The Sultana-Valida drew forth from amongst her garments the little porcelain cup; and into it she poured, according to Thekla's instructions, the entire contents of the small phial. Then, holding the cup between her eyes and one of the windows of the apartment, the Sultana-Valida gazed steadfastly upon the tracery of flowers which formed the pattern of the exquisite piece of china. Not the slightest effect was produced upon them: the colours retained all their vivid-

ness and brilliancy; while the porcelain itself continued in the most cloudless state of transparency. A gleam of satisfaction appeared upon the pale face of the Sultana; but Thekla's looks remained utterly unmoved. Then the Sultana-Valida approached the couch on which her imperial son lay sleeping: and she raised him gently to an almost sitting posture. Abdul-Medjid languidly opened his eyes; and those eyes, which when in a state of health shone with a fine brilliancy, now seemed to be glazed as if under the influence of death itself.

"Merciful Allah, he is dying!—it is too late!" murmured the Sultana-Valida, stricken with affright and dismay.

"No—it is not too late," said Thekla, in a tone of steady confidence. "Administer the elixir."

The Sultana, still with his eyes partially open, appeared to be in a state of almost complete unconsciousness, as if he were about to sink out of this world, into unknown realms of another. His lips were apart—for his under-jaw was falling: he looked like one who had scarcely a minute to live. The Sultana-Valida poured the contents of the porcelain cup into his mouth:—helpless and unconscious as an infant child that is sleeping, he suffered the liquid to flow down his throat:—and then, as his mother laid his head gently back upon the pillow, the imperial patient closed his eyes in profound slumber again.

The Sultana-Valida stood for some minutes by the side of the couch, with her eyes intently fixed upon the countenance of her son; his breathing was low but regular

—and it struck her that there was now a faint flush or rather very delicate tint upon his cheeks. She inwardly breathed a prayer that all would go well: and indeed, in her heart she had confidence in the wise woman, although she outwardly adopted every possible precaution which menace and terrorism enabled her to exercise for the sake of her own awful responsibility.

The two black officials now conducted Thekla to a chair at the extremity of the apartment, and there she sat down, one slave on her right hand and one on her left. She was still made to feel that she was not only a prisoner, but that her life hung in the balance, and that the silken bowstring was close at hand to encircle her neck should anything go wrong with the Sultan. But Thekla's countenance continued to display the calmest composure and confidence: nor were her looks thrown shudderingly upon the instrument of death which dangled over the arm of one of her sable custodians.

"How soon," inquired the Sultana-Valida, presently approaching Thekla, "may we expect to behold the results of your elixir's operation?"

"There ought already to be a delicate tint upon the cheeks," responded the wise woman.

"There is! there is!" ejaculated the Sultana-Valida, but speaking in a subdued tone.

"I knew it," rejoined Thekla. "In half an hour your Highness will behold the blueish circles disappearing from about the eyes, and the lips will regain their wonted redness. When you distinguish

these symptoms, I will then tell you what will be the next."

The half-hour passed in profound silence,—Thekla remaining seated between her two sable guards, and the Sultana-Valida standing by the side of her son's couch—for the most part motionless as a statue, gazing earnestly upon his countenance: but every now and then bending down to take a nearer survey of that face and to watch for the symptoms which the wise-woman had specified. At length an expression of anxious joy began slowly to overspread the Sultana-Valida's features: her eyes still remained riveted on the countenance of the sleeping Sultan,—until at length an ejaculation of delight escaped her lips, and she glided across the room towards Thekla.

"The blueish circles have almost completely disappeared from about the eyes," said the Princess, in a voice which was low but tremulous with joy: "the tint is brighter upon the cheeks—the skin looks clearer and purer—and the lips have regained their vermilion."

"Good," said Thekla: but it was with her wonted imperturbability that she spoke, and with an air which indicated that she only heard precisely what she had expected to hear. "In another half-hour," she continued, "the countenance of his Imperial Majesty will become of a deadly white; and then for an hour he will seem as if he were a corpse, only that his breathing may be heard."

The Sultana-Valida started, turned very pale, and bent an anxious, penetrating, mistrustful look upon the wise-woman.

"The elixir," continued Thekla still perfectly unmoved, "operates first upon the surface of the body, and opens the pores of the skin. It will now work inwardly, so to speak,—operating upon the vitals of the patient."

The wise-woman met without quaking the regards of the Sultana-Valida; and she spoke in a voice so replete with a calm confidence, that her Imperial Highness was again reassured. She accordingly returned to the side of the couch, where she watched for about half an hour—at the expiration of which interval she beheld so death-like a pallor settling upon the countenance of her son, that notwithstanding the warning she had received, and which might have partly prepared her to expect such an appearance, she was seized with consternation and dismay. Another hour passed—during which the Sultan looked like one dead, only that his breathing was regular, and though very low, was yet just audible. It was an hour of the acutest, most poignant suspense for the Sultana-Valida: every instant she longed to go and question Thekla again, for the pallor of the Sultan was frightful to behold: but still, as he continued to breathe, his mother abided the result.

The hour passed: for we should observe that the Sultana-Valida kept anxiously consulting her watch; and now she again glided across the room towards Thekla.

"In a few minutes," said the wise-woman, "the colour will come back to the cheeks of his Imperial Majesty, and his countenance will have the same appearance as it was wont to wear at the period of his vigorous health. He will perhaps

awaken and open his eyes; and if so, your Highness will perceive that they are bright, *not* with the unnatural brilliancy of fever, but with a proper healthful lustre. But should his Majesty thus awaken," continued Thekla, "your Highness must soothe him back to sleep again—and this task will not be found difficult."

Everything took place exactly as the wise-woman had described or anticipated! and the Sultana-Valida, now no longer entertaining the slightest distrust or apprehension, felt annoyed and vexed with herself that she should have at any moment displayed a want of confidence in Thekla. The Sultan awoke: he opened his eyes, which shone with their natural lustre. He recognised his mother—he smiled placidly and affectionately—she gently bade him repose—and he sank off to sleep again. Then as she gazed upon him, she did indeed perceive that his countenance was precisely the same as it was in the days of his most vigorous health, before the cares and anxieties arising from Russian menace and encroachment had begun to affect him. The Sultana, now gliding joyously and quickly across the room, seized Thekla by the hand, murmuring in a voice full of emotion, "You have saved my son!"

"Let his Imperial Highness slumber on till sunset," replied Thekla, gently yet firmly disengaging her hand, and still maintaining the cold serenity of her demeanour. "It is most probable that his Majesty will then awake of his own accord: but if not, let him be awakened. He will crave for food, which may be served up to him; and his

Majesty may even partake of wine, if he desire it. And now I have nothing more to say to your Highness; and I do not think there will be any need for the use of that silken string." X

It was thus for the first time throughout the incidents which we have been relating that the wise-woman suffered herself to make the slightest bitter allusion to the treatment she had experienced. The flush of shame appeared for a moment on the countenance of the Sultana-Valida; but recovering all her wonted dignity, she said, "I cannot blame myself for having adopted all necessary precautions, painful to both of us though they have been."

Her Imperial Highness then made a sign to the two black slaves; and they conducted Thekla from the apartment—but the one who carried the bowstring made it disappear beneath his vesture in the twinkling of an eye.

Soon after sunset the Sultana-Valida proceeded in person to Thekla's chamber,—thereby conferring the highest honour which an imperial princess could possibly bestow upon an individual of inferior rank. Casting all her dignity aside, the Sultana embraced the wise-woman, exclaiming, "You are the saviour of my son—and we both alike owe you an unpayable debt of gratitude. You are free, Thekla!—and his Imperial Majesty awaits your presence, that he may in person thank you, and that he may learn from your lips the mode in which he can best demonstrate all he feels for the service rendered by your skill."

"It is needless that I should

occupy the time of his Imperial Majesty," answered Thekla. "Your Highness has given me my liberty—I require nothing more—and I will therefore take my departure. Return me my porcelain cup: it belonged to my father—and I value it."

"Here is the cup, Thekla," said the Sultana-Valida, placing the exquisite little article upon the table. "But you will permit me to fill it with diamonds and jewels of the highest price?"

"Pardon me, Princess," rejoined the wise-woman: "but I will accept nothing at your hands. No one is more sensible of kindness than Thekla: but it must be a real and genuine kindness, and not a kindness following as an extreme upon the menace of death and the imminence of the bowstring."

The Sultana-Valida's countenance flushed with anger: but for very shame she could not give utterance to an irate word against the woman who had that very day saved her son's life. Indeed the bare sensation of that anger struck her as a remorse; and with a look and tone which were marvellously conciliating for her, the proud princess—the august mother of the reigning Sultan—she said, "I fear, Thekla, that you bear rancorous sentiments towards me; but I entreat you to accept those signal proofs of my gratitude which I would fain bestow."

"If your Highness speaks of gems or gold, I lack them not," answered Thekla, with the same cold look and tone which had all along characterized her discourse. "When I go forth hence—as in a few minutes I hope to do—I shall resume my wandering life. It

is the only means by which I can banish thought: for the thought of the past clings to me—and I am not what I seem without a reason!”

“You have known misfortunes, then, Thekla?” said the Sultana-Valida, her countenance wearing an expression of sympathy which was far from being altogether assumed.

The wise-woman reflected for upwards of a minute, as if deliberating with herself whether she should speak or not: but suddenly making her mind in favour of the affirmative, she said with a strange abruptness, “Listen, Highness—and I will tell you a tale.”

The Sultana-Valida sat down to imply that she would bestow upon Thekla as much time and patience as the wise-woman would like to crave; and the latter, after again reflecting profoundly for a brief space, spoke as follows:—

“Your Highness is aware that I am the daughter of the celebrated physician Ahmed Arslan. My father possessed a beautiful villa on the banks of the Bosphorus: and there did I reside, attended by numerous slaves, for my mother had died in my infancy. My age is now forty-five; and I am about to speak of a period which dates back for more than seven-and-twenty years. Consequently I was then a young creature of between seventeen and eighteen. It matters not how at that time I became acquainted with him to whom I have now to allude. He was several years older than myself, but of a rare masculine beauty. I believed him to be a gentleman attached to the Court, but of no very considerable distinction. We met constantly—we roamed together amidst the

shady groves on the banks of the Bosphorus: and not more delicious was the fragrance of the orange-blossoms to the air, than was the language of love which he breathed to my ear. I was confiding—all too confiding! I believed the excuses which he proffered for not speaking to my father of our love, and for not demanding my hand in marriage. In that blind confidence I fell! My honour was sacrificed to his passion! In due time I was in a way to become a mother: no longer could my disgrace be concealed. But then the ardour of him in whom I had trusted began to abate—his visits grew fewer and farther between—until at length they ceased altogether. Driven to despair, I proceeded to Constantinople: I watched in the neighbourhood of the palace in the hope of beholding my faithless lover. At last after many hours of weary waiting, the trumpets sounded—the troops came forth—the crowd was ordered to stand back; for his Imperial Majesty the Sultan Mahmoud was about to proceed in grand state to the mosque of Suleimanya. Then I thought to myself that I was sure to behold him whom I sought, in the imperial procession. And I did, Highness! My faithless lover—the wanton destroyer of my happiness—the betrayer of my honour—was there! With mingled wildness and consternation I recognised him: he was——”

“Who?” inquired the Sultana-Valida, who had listened to this narrative with the deepest interest. “Who was he?”

Thekla looked steadily at the princess, and then said, “He was the Sultan Mahmoud himself!”

"Ah! is this possible?" ejaculated the Sultana-Valida.

"Yes, Highness—it was he!" responded Thekla; "and this day I have saved the life of his son!"

"Oh, tell me what happened?" cried the Sultana. "Did the Sultan Mahmoud perceive you? Did he know that you recognised him?"

"The Sultan perceived me and recognised me," answered Thekla. "He sent one of his officers to speak to me; and the message thus conveyed to my ear was to the effect that on the morrow his Majesty would meet me in privacy at our accustomed trysting-place. He kept his word: he proposed that I should enter his harem, and that I should be one of his favourite slaves. I scorned the proposition, for it was indeed a gilded slavery which the Sultan thus proffered. We separated, and we never met again. My father was at that period saved by a sudden death from the pain of learning his daughter's dishonour: he accidentally cut himself with the scapel whilst dissecting a corpse—the wound fastened—the poison spread rapidly throughout his frame—and in three days he was a corpse. I became a mother: but the infant perished at its birth. All my life's happiness was gone—and I felt that henceforth I could not abide in any one place. I gave to the poor the fortune which I inherited from my father; and keeping only a small sum for my immediate use, as well as a book containing many precious secrets in the medical art which my deceased parent had thus chronicled, I set out as a wanderer upon the face of the earth. Now, Highness, my history is concluded; and you comprehend the meaning

of my words that the thought of the past clings to me."

"Unfortunate Thekla!" said the Sultana-Valida, speaking with the most real sympathy. "And you have this day saved the life of the son of his who ruined your happiness!"

"It is even so Highness," rejoined Thekla: "and if I have told you this tale, it was only to prove that I need not rewards of gems or of gold; for I have already my recompense in returning, as it were, good for evil. I might have sought to avenge upon the son the wrongs which I received from the father: but no! I should hate myself if even for an instant I had harboured such an idea! And now your son is saved, Highness: his health is completely invigorated—and here is another phial of the precious elixir which on any future occasion may prove useful in your hands."

"Oh, before you depart, Thekla," exclaimed the Sultana-Valida, taking the phial, "teach me your wondrous secret!—teach it me, I implore you!"

"No, Highness," answered Thekla, firmly: "that may not be. I made you the offer once; but instead of having confidence in me, you yielded to the false representations of designing men whose souls were filled with envy and jealousy, and you kept me here a prisoner for many long months. Had your son continued in the enjoyment of health, I might have remained a captive for years, or until the end of my life. It was only when reduced to despair that you thought of me, and that you had recourse to the hitherto scorned, contemned, or perhaps forgotten Thekla! Pardon me for speaking boldly, Highness:

but in all these proceedings of yours there were the caprices of tyranny ;—and therefore it is now too late for you to seek of my lips the revelations of my secret."

The Sultana-Valida could not help admitting to herself the justice of the chastisement which the wise-woman thus inflicted upon her ; and the anger which would otherwise have taken possession of her, was subdued by a sense of shame, remorse, and humiliation. After a pause that proud princess said, humbly, "At least, Thekla, you will accept this as a token of my gratitude and esteem?"—at the same time unloosing from her neck a chain of massive gold, of curious workmanship the links having at intervals little medallions each set with a sparkling gem, and the whole worth a monarch's ransom.

"No, Highness," replied Thekla ; "I will accept nothing except my liberty. Am I free to depart?"

"You are free to depart," rejoined the Sultana-Valida, in a low, mournful tone, and with an expression of deep regret, remorse, and shame upon her countenance.

Thekla placed the little porcelain cup in her box ; and after making a respectful obeisance to the Sultana-Valida, she issued from the room. In a few minutes she was beyond the precincts of the palace ; and the wandering wise-woman breathed the fresh air of liberty once again.

CHAPTER LI.

KUTAIS.

IT was about three weeks after the incidents which we have just related, that Thekla entered Kutais, the capital city of the little principality of Mingrelia. From

inquiries previously made, Thekla knew that the Princess was then resident at her palace,—where indeed she had been for some months past :—and thither did the wise-woman accordingly proceed.

She found the palace to be a moderate-sized but very handsome building, with spacious pleasure-grounds attached : and at the principal entrance there were two guard-houses,—one occupied by some of the Mingrelian militia, and the other by soldiers of the Russian garrison. We have already informed the reader that Mingrelia was suffered to enjoy a shadow of independence by having its own native sovereign and being governed by its own laws : but the Russians were the virtual masters of the territory—and they had garrisons in all the principal towns. Indeed, the Ministers of the Princess Leila dared not take any important step without first consulting the Russian commandant : but, as a matter of delicacy they concealed from her Highness the full extent to which they were thus subservient to Russian domination. It was not a direct Muscovite tyranny, so to speak, which prevailed in Mingrelia ; but Muscovite influence was nevertheless paramount, though it was wielded in those indirect, stealthy, insidious ways which did not positively shock nor openly outrage the feelings of the Mingrelians. It was therefore a system maintained by cunning rather than by violence ; and while the Mingrelians flattered themselves that they were a free people, tolerating Russian garrisons, they were in reality enslaved to the Russian policy.

Thekla, on presenting herself at

the gate of the palace, was referred by the sentinel whom she first accosted, to the porter who sat in his lodge. Of this functionary she inquired whether it were possible for her to obtain an audience of her Highness the Princess Leila?—and the porter demanded her name. The instant she mentioned it, the official rose, bowed respectfully, and desired Thekla to traverse the court-yard, for that her request would be immediately complied with. The wise-woman now reached the inner portals of the palace; and she again mentioned her name to two or three servitors in handsome liveries who were lounging in the hall. It seemed as if that name of Thekla operated like magic: for the instant it was announced, the lacqueys assumed a demeanour of the utmost respect—and one of them requested Thekla to follow him. He led her up a spacious staircase communicating with a landing richly ornamented; and thence he conducted her into an ante-chamber, where some half-dozen young ladies, attached to the person of the Princess, were assembled. Two of these young ladies gave utterance to ejaculations of joy on beholding the wise-woman; and the next instant she found her hands warmly clasped by Zaida and Emina.

"Oh!" exclaimed Zaida, "our beloved mistress will be so delighted to see you! Her Highness has wondered why you have never communicated with her, and wherefore you have not visited her according to the promise which it seems you made some months back in Constantinople."

"Scarcely a day has passed," added Emina, "that her Highness

has not mentioned your name; and she long ago issued the strictest orders that should you present yourself at the palace, you were to be treated with every respect."

"I have just experienced the proof that such orders were indeed issued," replied Thekla; "and I am most grateful to your beloved mistress."

"Come quick, good Thekla!" said Zaida; "her Highness is alone: but even if she were engaged in no matter what important business, she would make time to see you."

The wise-woman was now conducted by the two over-joyed damsels to a splendidly-furnished apartment, where the Princess Leila was seated upon a sofa. The portals of the saloon moved so noiselessly upon their hinges that Leila did not immediately become aware of the presence of those who were entering: she was in a pensive mood, and her looks were bent downward. Thekla beheld before her that same bewilderingly beautiful creature in whom she had conceived so great an interest, and to serve whom she had alike dared and encountered so many perils. But though all the ravishing loveliness which characterized the Princess was still as remarkable as ever, it struck Thekla that Leila's cheek was somewhat pale; and perhaps the wise-woman could guess wherefore, for she had already learnt, on first entering the city of Kutais, some few particulars in reference to Prince Danial.

Zaida hastened towards her young mistress, to make her aware of Thekla's arrival: but Leila now raised her eyes and caught sight of the wise-woman. Springing

from the sofa, the Star of Mingrelia rushed forward and threw herself into Thekla's arms. The wise-woman was about to observe the usual etiquette by sinking on her knees before the Princess; but Leila would not permit her:—she regarded the wise-woman as a dear and esteemed friend, and treated her as such. Zaida and Emina retired; and Thekla remained alone with the Princess.

They had much to say to each other; for Leila was utterly ignorant of everything which had occurred to Thekla since they parted in Constantinople several months back. The wise-woman related all those incidents with which the reader has been made acquainted; and Leila listened with the deepest sympathy and interest to the recital. She expressed her sorrow that Thekla should have endured captivity on her account; and tears flowed down the cheeks of the beautiful Princess as she spoke. But Thekla assured her that she held all misfortunes cheap when she remembered that they were occasioned by the service she had rendered to one in whom she was so profoundly interested.

"And now," said Thekla, with some degree of diffidence, and hesitatingly approaching the topic, "permit me to inquire of your Highness concerning your cousin, the generous and high-spirited Prince Danial? On entering Kutais, I made certain inquiries; and to my astonishment I learnt that Prince Danial had been compelled to proceed to St. Petersburg, or else had been actually sent thither in a sort of honourable captivity."

"Listen, Thekla," said the Princess, heaving a profound sigh;

"and I will tell you all that has occurred. But you have forgotten to ask concerning your friend Klodissa!"

"Ah, Klodissa!" said the wise-woman quickly, at the same time darting a rapid glance at Leila—but which the Princess however did not perceive.

Leila described everything that had occurred at Tiflis with respect to Tunar, so far as his trial, acquittal, and liberation were concerned; and then she said. "As for Klodissa, my cousin and I parted from her at some distance from Tiflis; and I have every reason to believe that she is perfectly happy:"—for the Princess did not choose to mention a syllable in reference to the Vale of Gulistan.

"And now with regard to Prince Danial?" said Thekla, inquiringly.

"I will tell you," responded Leila. "My cousin obtained from the Pasha of Kars all the requisite proofs to establish his identity as a Mingrelian Prince; and after a little while we arrived in Kutais. Alas! I need not explain to you that the Russians exercise a real virtual sovereignty here, and that I am the ruler of Mingrelia in name rather than in fact. I am but a crowned phantom, Thekla:—though heaven knows that I care not for the exercise of sovereign power save and except as far as it might enable me to accomplish much good for the benefit of my people. However, to continue my narrative, you can easily comprehend that it was requisite to consult the Russian Commander-in-Chief before I dared proclaim to the Mingrelians the rank and titles of my cousin. The Russian commandant threw difficulties in the

way of recognising the Prince's claims. Need I tell you, Thekla, that I love my cousin Danial, or that I promised him my hand? Finding that the commandant feared to acknowledge him as a Mingrelian Prince, I proposed to abdicate my sovereignty and retire into private life, that I might become my cousin's bride. But the Russian General would not listen to the idea. Alas; it is evidently only too convenient for Muscovite policy that the crowned phantom of Mingrelia shall be a young weak female! Neither would my cousin Danial listen to the proposition: he would never consent that I should abandon the throne on which our ancestors had sat. The Russian Commander-in-Chief suggested that Danial should repair to St. Petersburg, to make known his claims to the Czar himself: and this suggestion was accompanied by a significant hint to the effect that my cousin must positively leave the Mingrelian territory until the Russian Government should have pronounced a decision in his case."

"Doubtless the Russian authorities," observed Thekla, "dreaded an insurrection of the Mingrelians against their rule, now that there was a Mingrelian prince to place himself at their head?"

"Yes. But my cousin Danial would not for a moment think of plunging his native country into the horrors of warfare," continued Leila; "and therefore he resolved to follow the commandant's suggestion and repair to St. Petersburg to plead his own cause in person. We parted"—here Leila heaved a profound sigh, and a tear

trickled down her cheek: we parted; and he set off with a suitable escort, amongst whom were his faithful dependants Ibrahim and Hafiz."

"And your Highness has received intelligence from your cousin?" said Thekla inquiringly: "may I hope that he has reached the Russian capital in safety?"

"Yes—he reached St. Petersburg in safety," rejoined the Star of Mingrelia; "and he was at once received by the Emperor Nicholas. His Imperial Majesty treated my cousin with the utmost distinction, and promised that the Grand Chancellor of the Empire should in due course investigate his claims. At a second audience the Czar proposed that my cousin should enter his service, offering at once to bestow upon him an important post at the Imperial Court, or else a high grade in the Russian army. But the Prince respectfully declined these propositions. He could not bring himself to serve the Russians, though for the sake of the welfare of the Mingrelians he would not fight against them. And now he remains in St. Petersburg—but alas! it is evident that the Russian Chancery is delaying as much as possible the investigation of his claims. Nevertheless, Prince Danial is making numerous powerful friends amongst the Russian nobility with whom he has come in contact; and they have promised to use their interest as far as they can or dare on his behalf. And now you know all."

"We must live and hope," remarked Thekla. "The claims of your Highness's cousin are so well grounded and so palpable,

that the Russian Government—arbitrary though it be, and so often unjust in its despotism—must acknowledge them in the long run. The Czar will no doubt throw every obstacle in the way and procrastinate the final decision as much as possible, in the hope of wearying out the young Prince's patience and inducing him to accept the propositions at first made. But heaven is just, Princess!—and it will not suffer two beings so good, so amiable, and so generous-hearted as yourself and your cousin, to remain unhappy through a prolonged separation!"

In this hopeful strain did Thekla continue to speak; and the Princess was much cheered by her words. The amiable Leila besought the wise-woman to fix her abode altogether beneath the palatial roof, and to dwell there for the remainder of her days; but Thekla, while expressing her gratitude for the generous proposal, declared that she was doomed to lead a wandering life—that it suited her habits and tastes, and that she could not possibly settle down in any fixed abode—no, not even though it were to enjoy the society of one whom she loved so much as Leila. But the wise-woman consented to remain a few weeks at the palace; and during that interval she taught Leila the secret of compounding her precious elixir. At the expiration of about two months Thekla took her departure, for the purpose of proceeding to Tiflis; but she faithfully promised that, if she lived, she would at no very distant interval return to Kutais to pay her respects to the Star of Mingrelia.

Taking leave of Leila and the

wise-woman for the present, we must now proceed, in the ensuing chapter, to carry back the reader's attention into the midst of the Eastern Caucasus.

CHAPTER LII.

DORVAL AND KLODISSA.

NOTHING could exceed the astonishment of Count Dorval when he discovered that the wounded female was evidently endowed by nature with a pure transparent complexion, but that she had for some purpose or another dyed her face, her neck her bosom, and her arms, of that dusky tint which gave her the appearance of a gipsy. But without pausing many moments to wonder what could possibly have been the motive for such a disguise, Dorval proceeded to ascertain if she were still living, or if the blow dealt by Tunar had proved mortal. He found that she breathed: he stanchd the blood as well as he was able; and then thinking that she might need a fresher air than that which prevailed at the extremity of the cavern, he carried her in his arms to the entrance. In a short time she began to revive—but very slowly; and as she languidly opened her dark eyes, they looked vacantly up into the old man's face, in a way which showed him that she could not collect her thoughts sufficiently to remember what had taken place. He began to reflect that so serious a wound, followed by the loss of so much blood, must necessarily leave her weak and enfeebled for some days to come, even if she should recover at all. He

knew not how to dispose of her, unless he should be enabled to discover the secret means of opening the door in the pedestal of the statue,—in which case he might bear her down into the Valley of Gulistan.

Dorval assured himself that the blood was completely stanchèd; and as it was bitterly cold at the entrance of the cavern, he removed Klodissa farther into it; and taking off his own upper garment he covered her therewith. He then sped back to the extremity of the cave; and he carefully examined the pedestal of the statue. But he could not discern the slightest trace of the door, nor the means of opening it. He kept hastening back to Klodissa to see if she still lived—then back again to the statue; and thus a couple of hours passed,—at the expiration of which time Dorval found himself compelled to settle his mind to the conclusion that it was impossible for him to discover the secret means of opening the door of the statue.

Now what was he to do? He himself was half famishing for want of food; the wounded female was in a condition that required every attention and comfort: but how in that wild ungenial region was Dorval to provide for any of these wants? There he was, on the very threshold, so to speak, of a vale where summer reigned and where the most delicious fruits might be gathered; but he was unable to penetrate an inch further towards that paradise. Would Tunar return and give him admission? The old man hoped so; but yet this hope was only feeble;—for within the last few hours his

opinion of Tunar had very materially changed, and he had begun to comprehend much of the selfishness, the churlishness, and the real un-amiability of the youth's disposition. Besides, the very way in which Tunar had so precipitately rushed forward to enter into the valley, closing the door behind him, and without apparently bestowing a thought upon his aged companion, almost forbade the hope that he would very speedily return to afford Dorval admittance thither.

Klodissa lived; but she was unconscious of all that had happened—insensible to everything; and there was the certain prospect that she would thus continue for some days if she should survive at all. Dorval was a kind-hearted man; and he was resolved to minister unto her to the utmost of his power. She might remain in that cavern; but she required something soft to repose upon, as well as warmer clothing than that which she had on. And then too, food must be procured; and again did Dorval keep asking himself how these wants were possibly to be supplied? Three hours had now passed since the tragic scene in the vicinage of the statue; and Tunar did not make his appearance.

"No—he will not come!" said the old man to himself: "he is revelling in the delights of that beautiful valley;—and perhaps, uncertain in respect to the blow which he dealt this unfortunate female, he would be afraid to come forth again, even if his inclination prompted him on my behalf. And who knows but that in his mingled selfishness and terror,—who knows but that he may have by some means fastened the secret door on

the inner side, so as to shut out all others from the charming vale? No—it is certain that he will not come to conduct me thither!"

Having arrived at this conclusion, Dorval again found himself thrown back entirely on his own resources; and he sat down by Klodissa's side to reflect. To remain in that cavern was to court starvation: he must go elsewhere for what he required—he must return into the midst of the wilds of the Caucasus, in the hope of falling in with some peasants or travellers who might possibly be enabled to supply his immediate wants. All of a sudden he recollected the balloon which was left on the spot where it had descended; and he resolved to return thither. For if he should be fortunate enough to find the balloon in the same place, it would furnish the materials to make a comfortable bed for the use of Klodissa. But could he leave her where she was? If Tunar should happen by any chance to come forth from the valley, might he not, on finding that Klodissa still lived, finish the dreadful work which he had begun?—and would it not be on Dorval's part the abandonment of the unfortunate female to the youth's vindictive rage?

All these considerations brought the old man to the resolve of moving the wounded Klodissa. He took her up in his arms in the most careful manner; he carried her out of the cavern—he bore his unconscious burden to the wooden bridge across the torrent. There he rested for a brief interval; and then he pursued his way, with Klodissa again in his arms. Commencing the ascent of the ledge-

like path, Dorval toiled painfully up it; and at length the top was reached. He recollected the cavern to which Tunar had taken him when the youth deviated from his way to ascertain if there were any horses there; and for a moment Dorval thought of bearing Klodissa to that cave. But then he said to himself, "No—this plan will not suit; for if Tunar should by any chance happen to return speedily into this region, he might again repair to that cave, and Klodissa would be as much at his mercy as if I had left her on the spot whence I have thus far borne her away."

Dorval accordingly decided upon bearing the still unconscious female into some other part; and he now looked carefully about him, so that he might fall into no error in his attempt to retrace the way towards the district where he had left the balloon. The reader has already seen that Dorval was a man of rare intelligence—a keen observer, and sharp-witted; for all the occupations of his imprisonment had tended to develop rather than to deaden or crush his mental energies. It will not therefore seem surprising that he should have well remembered the route by which Tunar had conducted him, or that he was now enabled to retrace it. At some little distance he found a small cave, the mouth of which was almost completely concealed by a group of evergreens; and in this cave he deposited Klodissa. He then hastened on towards the spot where the balloon had descended. The marks of footsteps in the snow—his own and Tunar's steps—continued to aid him from time to time in the

process of thus retracing his way ; and he reached the place where Tunar had found the lamp in the cave. Dorval now perceived a slight wreath of smoke curling up into the air close by the entrance of that cave : and his heart leapt for joy, as he exclaimed to himself, " There must be travellers on that spot ! "

But on drawing nearer, he discerned no human being, though there was assuredly a fire burning at the entrance of the cave. He reached the spot ; and to his joy he discovered the greater portion of the carcase of a goat lying at a little distance. Some of it had been cut away to furnish the repast of the individuals, whosoever they were, that had evidently been there but a short time back. No one was in the cave. The travellers had therefore taken their departure. Dorval tarried for a little space to broil a morsel of the goat on the embers of the fire, for he was well-nigh exhausted with fatigue and famine—and the meal, rude though it were refreshed and invigorated him. It was now therefore with renewed energy that he continued his way in the direction of the spot where the balloon had been left. While he was thus proceeding, he fancied that he beheld some travellers at a distance ; and though they were on horseback, they were proceeding very slowly. Dorval sped towards them ; and he soon discovered that they consisted of a man and two females,—all three mounted upon good steeds ; while a fourth horse, laden with several burdens, was being led by the man. On observing Dorval hastening towards them, these travellers stopped short ; and as the old Count drew near, he gathered from

the address and appearance of the party that they were a mountaineer family in easy circumstances. The man was of middle age ; one of the females was his wife—the other was their daughter. Their homestead was at a distance of some dozen leagues amongst the hills ; they had been on a visit to Tiflis—and were now returning to their own habitation, the sumpter-horse being laden with provisions and articles of raiment which they had purchased in the Georgian capital. All these little particulars Dorval presently learnt while in conversation with the mountaineer and his family.

They were at first surprised to behold so strange-looking an individual wandering amidst those awful solitudes ; but he had a tale ready to tell them. He devised some fiction to the effect that he had been plundered and ill-treated by a party of Russian soldiery ; for he conjectured that to represent himself as the victim of Russian tyranny would prove the surest way to win the sympathies to which he sought to appeal. And he was right. The mountaineer and his family at once proffered their services : they invited the old man to their homestead—but his proposition he declined on the plea that his route was in quite a contrary direction from that which they themselves were pursuing. Then the mountaineer, springing from his steed, hastily unpacked the contents of the panniers borne by the sumpter-horse, and generously bade Dorval help himself to as much of the provender as he could carry with him. The old Frenchman lost no time in rendering this offer available ; and with numerous expressions of

gratitude, he separated from the kind-hearted mountaineers.

They were soon out of sight; and Dorval continued his way towards the spot where he hoped to find the balloon. Nor was he in this hope disappointed; for the machine had been carried by the wind to an adjacent thicket, where its further progress was arrested by the entangling of the cords among the leafless branches. Dorval had with him a knife which he had brought away from the castle of Garanrog; and he proceeded to sever the ropes which held the silk attached to the rude car. He folded up the silk as compactly as possible; and then he began to retrace his way towards the little cave where he had left Klodissa.

The dusk of that wintry season was closing in when Dorval reached the cave: Klodissa was still living—but still unconscious of whatsoever was passing around her. Dorval determined to make that cave his habitation for the present, while he watched over his patient. It was large enough for the purpose; and the evergreens at the mouth afforded a protection against the bleakness of the wind. He made Klodissa a couch with the silk and with all the fragments of the bedding which had been torn up at Garanrog to furnish materials for the balloon; and the wounded female now reposed in comparative comfort. Having collected a quantity of dry wood, which happened to abound in the neighbourhood of the cave, Dorval made a fire, so as to impart a genial heat to the otherwise cold atmosphere. He then lay down and slept, for he was thoroughly exhausted; but frequently throughout the long hours which followed

until morning dawned, he awoke to assure himself that Klodissa still lived.

When the day dawned, Dorval proceeded to cook some farinaceous food, which was amongst the articles he had obtained from the mountaineers, and for the preparation of which he had procured a small earthen pipkin from the same generous source. He now fed Klodissa as if she were an infant child and he an attentive nurse. She opened her eyes; but still her gaze was full of vacancy—she was evidently far from comprehending her own condition or even having the power to reflect why she was thus kindly treated by the strange old man who bent over her. Having partaken of his own meal, Dorval left Klodissa for a little while, and proceeded to fetch the remnant of the goat; for he felt the necessity of economizing his provisions as much as possible, knowing not how long his detention in that place might be.

And now, to be brief, we may observe that a week passed before Klodissa recovered the faculty of speech. Indeed, it was only when awaking on the fourth morning after her encounter with Tunar and the old man, that she regained the powers of memory and of reason. Then, on becoming sensible of all the kindness she was experiencing at the hands of this old man, she expressed with her looks the fervid gratitude with which his conduct inspired her. She made signs to elicit explanations from Dorval's lips; for she was anxious to know who he was and how he had fallen in with Tunar: but the old man gently entreated her to abstain from any-

thing that might in the least degree tend to excite her;—and thus it was not until the full week had elapsed that any explanation took place between them. Then, on Klodissa recovering the faculty of speech, she renewed in words those assurances of gratitude which her looks had already conveyed; and she went on to speak in the following strain:—

“You have discovered the secret of that disguise which my complexion partially wears: but I trust to your generous forbearance not to seek an explanation of that mystery from my lips. I can assure you, my kind friend, that the disguise was not adopted for any evil purpose!”

“I believe you,” responded the old man. “Keep your secret—and by me it shall be respected. But you are one of those favoured mortals who have been permitted to enjoy the delights of the Vale of Gulistan——”

“Oh, would that I had never thought of issuing thence!” exclaimed Klodissa; “and then this terrific calamity would not have befallen me! Where is that villain Tunar?”

“He entered by the secret door whence you yourself so suddenly emerged, and that door closed behind him.”

Dorval proceeded to relate everything connected with himself, and with which the reader is already acquainted. He told Klodissa his history just as he had told it to Tunar: he described to her how Tunar had become his fellow-prisoner at Garanrog; and he depicted the wondrous means by which they had escaped together. He then stated how Tunar had

guided him to the cavern forming the entrance to the Vale of Gulistan—and how they were searching for the indication of some secret door at the very moment when Klodissa emerged from the pedestal of the statue.

“And you say that I have been here a week?” exclaimed Klodissa; “and that seven whole days have elapsed since I received this dreadful wound?”

“Seven whole days,” replied Dorval; “and this is the morning of the eighth.”

“And you are convinced,” proceeded Klodissa, quickly and eagerly, “that Tunar was utterly unacquainted with the mysteries enveloping the means of entrance from the Cavern of the Statue into the valley?”

“I am convinced,” rejoined Dorval. But doubtless he is now revelling in the delights of that vale——”

“No!” said Klodissa, a fierce fire illuminating the large dark eyes which for a week past had been glazed as if under the influence of the cold touch of death itself: “no, my kind benefactor! If Tunar were really as ignorant of those mysteries as you believe and represent, his foot has never been set within that vale! As a prisoner has he been detained in the bowels of the mountain; and famine must ere this have done its dreadful work!”

“Good heavens!” cried the old man, shocked and horrified at the announcement: “is this really so?”

“Doubtless it is so,” replied Klodissa. “But it is heaven’s own righteous vengeance, which has overtaken that youth: for there

breathed not a being in human shape more capable of every wickedness than he! a consummate dissembler——"

"Yes, yes—he must have been!" exclaimed Dorval: "I understand his character now! But oh! perhaps it may not be too late to save him from a hideous death! I will speed to the cavern—you must tell me the secret in respect to the door of the pedestal——"

"I dare not breathe that secret from my lips," answered Klodissa: "I have recorded in heaven a solemn vow to that effect! But when I am able to leave this cave, you shall accompany me, good old man—you shall penetrate with me into that delicious valley; and thus will I testify all my gratitude towards you. It may be an evasion of the *spirit* of my vow—but still that vow will be observed to the *letter* if I breathe not the secret from my lips; and my conscience may thus be satisfied."

Klodissa had in reality made no vow of the kind,—nothing of the sort having been exacted from her by Princess Leila: but it was an excuse which now suited her purpose. She wished Tunar to die: she thought it just probable that he might not be already dead, but that a vigorous constitution might yet be battling against seven days of famine; and therefore she did not choose that Dorval should repair to the subterranean entrance into the Vale of Gulistan with the chance of finding Tunar alive and of restoring him to freedom. The old man in the natural goodness of his heart, would gladly have rushed off to render succour to the youth if it were not yet too late: but on hearing Klodissa thus

speak, he was compelled to resign his benevolent intention—though it was with a profound sigh that he did so.

"Then must we leave Tunar to his fate!" said Dorval. "But you will take me with you into the Vale of Gulistan: I accept the proffer with all the gratitude which so great a boon cannot fail to inspire. At the same time let me give you the assurance that I have ministered unto you simply as towards a suffering fellow-creature from the sincerest and most unselfish motives—and not because I looked forward to the attainment of this reward which you have promised."

"I know it, worthy Count," responded Klodissa. "Not for an instant did I imagine that you had been actuated by selfish motives! Your conduct towards me has been characterized by the most delicate attentions, and by a manifestation of a real paternal affection! It is for this reason that I am resolved, no matter at what risk of evading the vow which I have taken, to conduct you into the Vale of Gulistan. But I shall exact a solemn pledge from your lips——"

"Name it," said the old man.

"The secret, you perceive, is not altogether mine," continued Klodissa: "share it with two others——I cannot name them——Suffice it however to add that I dare not without their consent introduce anyone into the valley to become a permanent dweller there. The vale, as you have been led to suppose, abounds in precious gems: and you shall bear away with you enough to be equivalent to a dozen monarchs' ransoms! For three days only must you

sojourn in the vale; because those other two persons who are in possession of the secret, and to whom I have alluded, promised me that in the course of five or six months they would return to pay me a visit. That period has well nigh elapsed; and therefore at any moment may they make their appearance. They would reproach me with having broken my vow if they discovered you there;—and now you comprehend wherefore that I stipulate that your sojourn in the valley must be limited to but a few days—though on the other hand you will be amply indemnified for your departure from that blessed retreat, by the immensity of the wealth that you may bear away with you.”

Dorval—whose main object in seeking the Valley of Gulistan had all along been for the sake of the riches he hoped to find there—readily promised to comply with Klodissa’s stipulations; and to this effect he bound himself by a solemn oath.

“When the time comes,” continued Klodissa, “that I shall be enabled to conduct you into that valley. I know that you will respect this oath—because you are good and generous, and must therefore be an honourable man. And when the instant arrives for you to take your departure, I will provide you with a steed. My own horse has been left to wander at large on a little plain at no great distance hence, where a cavern serves as its stable. For upwards of five months have I dwelt in the valley; and every week—sometimes indeed oftener—I have issued forth to visit my steed. The animal roams not away from the neighbourhood

where I first left it to pasture, and where I have thus periodically visited it. You may therefore rest assured that the steed will be at your service when the moment of your departure comes. It was to pay my accustomed visit to the faithful animal that I was thus issuing from the Vale of Gulistan at the unfortunate moment when I encountered Tunar.”

“Referring to Tunar,” said Dorval, “you have spoken generally of his evil disposition; and as your language was strong, I conceive that he must have perpetrated crimes of which you have a knowledge. Besides, I have not forgotten,” added Dorval, “that your dagger was in the first instant aimed at his breast, though the next instant it pierced your own. Surely you must have had some very strong reason to have sought the life of that youth?”

“Every reason!” ejaculated Klodissa. “He was an accomplice in the basest plot against the peace and happiness of an amiable and excellent young lady in whom I am warmly interested; and as one of the fatal results of that plot, his worthy master the venerable Mansour was foully murdered!”

“This is indeed horrible!” exclaimed the old Count.

“Then Tunar obtained possession of certain private papers belonging to Mansour,” continued Klodissa; “and from thence he gleaned a certain insight into the mysteries of Gulistan. Therefore the knowledge which brought him to the very threshold of that paradise, was most treacherously and unworthily obtained: and when I found that such a wretch was evidently seeking to penetrate into

the valley, I acted as one who was bound to defend its entrance against all who are unworthy of experiencing its bliss. You now understand wherefore I turned my dagger's point against Tunar the moment we met;—and if there were anything on my part sinful in the deed, the wrong has been terribly chastised by the blow which recoiled against myself!"

A great deal more conversation took place between Klodissa and Count Dorval; but it is not requisite to chronicle its details. We must however observe that it was frequently interrupted by intervals of languor and weariness on Klodissa's part; so that Dorval as often conjured her to postpone any farther discourse until the evening or the morrow. But she declared that her energies were rapidly reviving, and that the intermittent periods of reaction soon passed away. To be brief, in two or three days Klodissa was enabled to walk forth from the cave, leaning upon Dorval's arm; and at the expiration of a week from the period when her recovery commenced—a fortnight in all from the date of the wound's infliction—she was convalescent.

The dye with which Klodissa had stained a portion of her complexion, was a decoction made from certain drugs; and it required to be renewed about every fortnight; otherwise it gradually grew paler and paler until it disappeared altogether, leaving the skin as clear and beautiful as it naturally was. Klodissa had not used the dye for upwards of a week previous to receiving the wound at the hand of Tunar;—thus three weeks had now elapsed

since the decoction had been applied to her skin, and the stain had by this time well-nigh paled to the very verge of complete disappearance. Dorval could not help expressing his regret that any circumstance should have induced her to use the dye at all. She was struck by the observation—the vanity of the woman was touched; and she murmured to herself, "Alter all, the objects for which I originally adopted this disguise have been fully attained! Wherefore thus disfigure myself, and mar the beauty which heaven has given me?"

She reflected for a few minutes; and then she silently said within her own heart. "It was merely to sustain appearances before Daniel and Leila, in case they should again visit Gulistan: but after all, why should I not suffer them to know the truth? why not proclaim everything to their knowledge? They have all possible reasons to thank me!—far more than they have reason to hate me! Yes!—assuredly I will discard the disguise!—henceforth I will retain my natural appearance as heaven itself created it!"

The resolve was taken: but Klodissa did not think it worth her while to communicate it to Count Dorval as they were so soon to separate.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE VALE OF GULISTAN.

THE day had come on which Klodissa felt sufficiently restored to health and strength to be enabled to visit the terrestrial paradise. Count Dorval was inwardly re-

joiced at the prospect of at length finding all his hopes realized; though outwardly his demeanour was calm and placid, as was its wont.

Klodissa, leaning upon the old man's arm, walked away from the cave where for upwards of a fortnight she had dwelt, and where he had ministered unto her with all the delicate yet affectionate attention which a father might have shown towards a dearly beloved daughter. They reached the edge of the precipice—they descended the ledge-like path—they crossed the raging torrent—they ascended the path amongst the trees, towards the Cavern of the Statue. And now, as they entered this cavern, Dorval's blood ran cold in his veins; for he thought that the fate of Tunar was about to be ascertained, and that it was utterly impossible the youth could be still alive!

The cavern was as dark as the blackest night; and they had no lamp with them. But Klodissa well knew the geography of the place; and she conducted the old man safely to the extremity where the statue stood. She opened the door—he could not see by what means, neither could he form the faintest conjecture: but he had no curiosity on the point—it was sufficient for him that he was at length about to enter into the terrestrial paradise cradled amongst the wilds of the Caucasus. The door closed with but a very gentle sound behind them; and now Klodissa said, "Tarry for a few moments while I light a lamp, which is here convenient in a niche. Were I by myself, I should descend in the dark—for the steps

are familiar to me. But with you it is different—And besides," she added in a lower voice, "we have something to search for!"

The old man shuddered; for he knew that this observation applied to the corpse of Tunar. The lamp was lighted; and Klodissa led the way. It was a spiral staircase cut out of the solid rock, down to an immense depth; so that a stupendous piece of man's handiwork did it appear to be. The footsteps of Klodissa and Dorval—especially those of the latter, they being much the heavier—raised echoes as they went on descending and descending the continuous corkscrew-like windings of that flight of steps. Now Dorval noticed that the deeper and deeper he was conducted down, the warmer grew the atmosphere,—gradually changing from the chill of winter which prevailed at the summit, to the genial heat of a delicious summer.

Down, down the spiral descent of steps did Klodissa and Dorval still proceed, the former leading the way and carrying the lamp. Every moment she expected to catch sight of the corpse of Tunar stretched upon the steps; and every instant did Dorval expect an ejaculation to burst from Klodissa's lips announcing that the unfortunate youth's remains were in sight. But no!—Klodissa behold not the body; and she remained silent. At length the bottom of the spiral flight was reached; and Klodissa led Dorval into a wide caverned passage hollowed, like the staircase itself, out of the solid rock. And now the hideous spectacle so anxiously awaited burst upon the view of Klodissa and Dorval: for there, stretched upon the ground—his

head resting against a block of granite—lay Tunar.

Klodissa held the lamp over the face of the dead : his features were pinched, sharp, and emaciated ; and there was a lingering expression of intense anguish upon them. The corpse had barely begun to undergo the process of decomposition ; and Dorval in a voice of much emotion murmured, " Unhappy youth ! he cannot have been dead more than three or four days ! For at least ten days, therefore, did he suffer the horrors of starvation ! Whatever his misdeeds may have been, the retribution was terrible !—and therefore let us hope that the atonement on earth was sufficient !"

Klodissa said not a word : but her eyes flashed with a fierce satisfaction on thus acquiring the certainty that Tunar was indeed no more, and the hand which had dealt her a blow that so nearly proved fatal, was now cold and motionless beneath the icy touch of death.

" He has perished on the very threshold of that paradise into which his heart so yearned to enter !" said Dorval, with a profound sigh. " And though I suspected it not at the time, there was something prophetic in the warning which I gave him when we stood together in the presence of the statue, and I said to him, '*Beware lest for all your errors of mind and temper it never be given unto thee to enter the Vale of Gulistan.*'"

It was thus Dorval mournfully mused as he stood contemplating the wan countenance of the dead : but all of a sudden Klodissa extinguished the lamp, and total darkness instantaneously succeeded. A momentary terror shot to Dorval's heart ; but Klodissa's voice was

heard softly saying in reassuring tone, " I have done this, kind old man, merely to satisfy my conscience on account of the vow which I have taken not to reveal the secret means of opening the doors which close the avenues into the valley. But now you are about to enter into the delights of Gulistan !"

Scarcely had she finished speaking, when a light streamed into the place ; and Dorval beheld a small door opened at the extremity of the passage—indeed just behind the block of granite on which the dead Tunar's head was reposing. It was evidently a door cut out of the solid rock itself ; but Dorval had no leisure to contemplate it—for Klodissa hurried him forward, and the door swung lightly behind them. The old Count instinctively looked back : but he beheld no traces of a door—naught but a surface of rugged rock, the precipitous face of which hung beelling over the line where a maze of the richest vegetation commenced, and which sloped gradually downward into the bosom of the vale.

Count Dorval was in the Valley of Gulistan !—that same valley into which Thekla had once entered, and which she described to Leila and Myrrha ! The huge towering mountains formed a complete circular barrier, rising up to a tremendous height, and by the vastness of their jutting crags and overhanging masses presenting a wall utterly inaccessible to the foot of man. Indeed, Dorval saw at a glance that except by means of a balloon it would be impossible for anyone to descend into the vale from outside the barrier of mountains, were it not for the artificial avenues of

communication hollowed in the bosom of the rock. He estimated that the bottom of the vale must be at least a mile lower than the level of the Cavern of the Statue; and this was at once a reason which would partially explain how the genial atmosphere of summer might prevail in that blessed retreat while horrid winter reigned throughout the districts that lay beyond the girdling circuit of those mountains. Still this reason was not sufficient to account for *all* the phenomena which Dorval now beheld: for not merely was the atmosphere that of summer, but all the bosom of the valley was arrayed in verdure—the most luscious fruits were pendant to the trees—the earth was carpeted with flowers in all the varieties of their loveliness. But almost one of the first features of this delicious retreat which struck the old man, was the infinite abundance of roses that were everywhere visible, and these of a size, of a richness of hue, and of a fragrance such as he had never known elsewhere. A beautiful ecstasy seized upon him: all his wonted placidity and imperturbability yielded to the excitement of the delicious influences by which he was surrounded.

Klodissa led him on through the mazes of that delightful valley, along paths shaded by fruit-trees and bordered by flowers, towards the grass plat in the midst of the vale, and where stood the grotto-like habitation described by Thekla as being built of curious stones, which shone with a stalactite brilliancy. The interior of the grotto was divided into three apartments, all handsomely furnished, but in a very old-fashioned style. There

Klodissa made the old man sit down at an open casement, while she hastened to fill a crystal dish with some of the most delicious fruits which teemed in such inexhaustible luxuriance all around. The air was warm, but not oppressive: there was nothing sickly in its heat: it seemed to borrow a freshness from the countless rills which everywhere rippled and meandered through the valley. Klodissa returned with the dish of piled-up fruits; and Dorval fancied that never had he elsewhere tasted nature's choicest products of so delicious a quality. Then Klodissa produced wine from a cupboard,—wine that was made in the valley from the grapes which festooned in indescribable profusion on every side. That wine proved to be a nectar worthy of being the product of such a region, and worthy likewise of being quaffed only there!

When Klodissa thought that Dorval had sufficiently rested himself she conducted him forth from the grotto, to render him acquainted with the principal features of the valley. First of all, she conducted him to the widest streamlet in the depth of whose crystal waters many varieties of fish were seen sporting; and then she directed his attention to a simple but ingenious means of catching the fish at will. This was by the contrivance of a sluice or lock, with a couple of miniature flood-gates; so that in a very few minutes all the water could be let out of the lock, and the fish that were in it at the time would be left lying on a marble slab at the bottom.

"Thus you perceive," said Klodissa, "that whosoever dwells in

the Vale of Gulistan, need not live upon fruits alone; for this rivulet supplies an abundance of the most delicious fish. And then, too," she continued, as she led the old man into the maze of verdure, "every species of vegetable peculiar to warm climates is to be found in the valley; and thus there are means of procuring endless varieties of food for the table."

While Klodissa was yet speaking, she and Dorval reached a strong line of fence which enclosed a large and beautiful meadow, where twenty or thirty sheep were pasturing, and where as many little lambs were frisking about.

"Here is another resource," said Klodissa, "for the supply of a variety of food. I have shown you how the dweller in this vale may obtain fish for his table—you now see how he may procure flesh—and in a few minutes you will find that the feathered tribe likewise contributes its share to the banquet."

Klodissa led the way to another but much smaller enclosure, adjoining the meadow; and this might be termed a poultry-yard. Every variety of poultry might be seen congregated there—the turkey with its crimson crest, the plump goose, the fowl, the duck, the tame pheasant, the bustard, and numerous other birds which had been thus domesticated. All along one side of the enclosure were the little grotto-like dwelling-places of the inhabitants of that poultry-yard; and Klodissa informed Dorval that it was often necessary to destroy the eggs, lest the feathered population of that yard should increase beyond the limits of its means of accommodation.

She conducted the old man forward; and she led him into some of those caves which, as the reader may recollect, Thekla has described as appearing to penetrate far beneath the very foundations of the mountain-barriers themselves, but into which she had not the courage to enter very far. It was in these caves that the precious metals, as well as the costliest gems of every description, were to be found, lying scattered about as if they were the stones which could be alone associated with the soil of that blessed spot. ✕

"Before you take your departure from the valley," said Klodissa "you shall make your selection from the illimitable varieties of treasure which these caverns afford. But now I will direct your attention to that which is perhaps the greatest natural curiosity of the Vale of Gulistan, and which will account for much that up to this moment cannot be otherwise than inexplicable to your imagination."

Thus speaking, Klodissa led the way towards a cavern from the mouth of which a steam, like a thin gauzy vapour, appeared to be issuing. The nearer they drew towards that spot, the warmer became the atmosphere—until it produced a sensation of the artificially-heated temperature of a hot-house. Dorval soon discovered the cause: for a hot spring gushed forth from the bowels of the mountain; and Klodissa bade him observe that at a little distance from the cave it branched off into half-a-dozen rills, which meandered through the valley.

"I have traced the course of every stream in the vale," said Klodissa: "and I have discovered

that nowhere do these heated rivulets mingle with the streams of cold water which harbour the fish. Thus you perceive how wonderfully and how admirably everything is contrived to maintain the distinctive features of this delicious retreat. The soil is irrigated by the softly tepid water; and thus vegetation is forced, so to speak, into the eternal verdure and luxuriant productiveness which in other parts of the world belong only to summer. But here winter is unknown. The depth to which the valley sinks below the level of the earth—these towering barriers of mountains which keep out all the bleak winds—and then the heat which this spring at its source in the cavern imparts to the atmosphere, all combine to preserve the eternal temperature of summer."

"And there is something more," said Dorval, who for the last few minutes had been reflecting deeply—"there is something more, Klodissa, than even your wisdom has discerned for the maintenance of so genial a temperature in the vale. There is a continuous volcanic action within the bowels of these mountains, and which, though not powerful enough to burst the granite walls that contain those hidden fires, nevertheless must be regarded by the eye of science as no mean agency in accounting for much of the marvellous condition of this valley. It is that same volcanic action which has so richly stored the depths of the caverns with the precious metals and with costly gems."

Klodissa was not altogether ignorant of those scientific topics to which Dorval was now alluding; and she listened with attention to

everything that he said. He expatiated at some length upon the subject, and on examining the rocks—especially within the entrances of the caverns—he discerned many proofs and illustrations of the theory which he had started in reference to the volcanic action that was eternally in progress within the bowels of the mountains.

There was another interesting spot in the Vale of Gulistan to which Klodissa presently conducted Count Dorval. This was a little cemetery, cradled in verdure—a nook completely hidden from the view until the barrier of shrubs and fruit-trees by which it was surrounded was completely passed through. There reposed the remains of many who had dwelt and died in the Vale of Roses; and a piece of granite stone marked every grave. But there was not a single inscription to indicate who slept beneath. It was there that Mansour had interred the old Prince Danial; and the stone most recently placed in that little cemetery, marked the last home of the former ruler of Mingrelia. On that spot therefore had Leila and Danial shed tears of holy grief when upwards of five months back they had visited the valley in company with Klodissa:—but of all these things Klodissa spoke not to Count Dorval.

Fortthree days did Dorval remain in the Vale of Gulistan. During that period he and Klodissa dug a grave in the cemetery, and therein they deposited the corpse of Tanar: but Klodissa would not suffer a stone to be placed above the youth's remains. She said it was only the elect who had a right to enter the valley, and who had lived

as well as died within its circuit, that could be thus honoured with a memorial.

In the morning of the fourth day Dorval prepared to take his departure according to his promise. He had secured about his person a number of the costliest gems which he had selected in the caverns, and which though in the aggregate weighing but a few ounces, would nevertheless produce him a fortune calculated to render him one of the richest men in the whole world. Mindful of the pledge which she had given him in respect to the steed, Klodissa intimated her intention of conducting Dorval to the spot where the animal was to be found. She so contrived matters that he could not perceive the means by which she opened the door of rock leading into the caverned passage at the foot of the spiral ascent of steps: and as she this time took no lamp while threading that staircase, she and the old Count were enveloped in total darkness—so that he discerned not the means by which she opened the door in the pedestal of the statue. All these precautions were indeed useless, as Dorval was a man of honour and intended to abstain thenceforth from any attempt to revisit the valley: but Klodissa deemed it prudent to adopt them, inasmuch as the means of opening the doors from the inner side, would, if known, suggest likewise the means of opening the doors from the exterior.

And now at length Count Dorval was beyond the precincts of Gulistan: he had bidden farewell for ever to that blessed retreat! But he did not repine, because he possessed about his person the means

of realizing illimitable wealth. The Cavern of the Statue was threaded—the bridge over the torrent was crossed—and up the ledge-like pathway did Dorval and Klodissa ascend. On gaining the summit of the precipice, Klodissa led the way towards the spot where she had left the steed; and there the animal was found in the cavern which formed its stable.

"But are you sure," inquired Dorval, "that you may not sooner or later need the horse to bear you away from this region?"

"No," replied Klodissa. "At one time I thought it probable that I might choose to go elsewhere; and for that reason did I keep my steed to be in readiness at any moment. But for weeks past my resolve has been taken to dwell altogether henceforth in the Vale of Gulistan; and therefore I require not the animal."

"Klodissa," said Dorval, in a voice full of emotion, "we are about to separate—on earth we shall never meet again—and in bidding you farewell, I feel as if I were parting from a beloved daughter!"

"And I, generous old man," responded Klodissa, as she proffered her hand, "am likewise much moved. I owe you my life!—never, never can I forget the kindness you displayed towards me—"

At this moment the Count and Klodissa were startled by the sudden explosion of wild cries of exultation, sent forth by half-a-dozen loud boisterous voices; and then as many men, all armed to the teeth, came rushing to the spot.

"I am lost!" exclaimed Dorval, in a tone of rending anguish; for

he at once recognised in those armed men a portion of the garrison of Garanrog Castle.

They seized upon Dorval: for a moment they fancied that the other escaped prisoner, Tunar, might possibly be disguised as a female; but a glance at Klodissa, showed them that she was a stranger. They therefore laid no hand upon her—they had no business with her. Dorval, for a moment fearfully excited, now resigned himself to the fate which he deemed to be inevitable; and he said, "Ill-treat me not: I will unresistingly accompany you."

But Klodissa appealed to the men in the most earnest and passionate terms on Dorval's behalf. They shook their heads in a stern and resolute manner; and they were about to hurry their prisoner away, when the sounds of the trampling of several steeds reached the ears of all who were upon that spot. Klodissa raised her voice, claiming the assistance of the advancing travellers, whoever they might be; and in a few moments a party of a dozen men, with rifles slung at their backs, appeared upon the scene. At their head rode a young and handsome chief; and now a cry of wild joy suddenly pealed forth from Klodissa's lips—and that cry was accompanied by the mention of a name.

"Kyri!" she exclaimed: "Kyri! is it thou?"

"Myrrha!—my own Myrrha!" ejaculated the chief: and he was about to spring from his steed to fold his wife in his arms—but she at once checked him by a quick gesture.

"Deliver that old man from those ruffians, Kyri!" she cried: "for he has saved my life!"

In another moment a terrific combat commenced. The soldiers of Garanrog at once let go their hold upon Dorval, in order that they might betake themselves to weapons; and the old man quickly led Klodissa into the cavern, that they might both be beyond the reach of the shots that were now being fired. The conflict was short—for the odds were as two to one in favour of Kyri Karaman's party; and they, moreover, had the advantage of being mounted, whereas their opponents were on foot. In about ten minutes all was over the half-dozen soldiers of Garanrog lay stretched lifeless upon the ground—Count Dorval was delivered—and Myrrha was embraced in the arms of her husband, Kyri Karaman.

CHAPTER LIV.

KYRI AND MYRRHA.

TEN minutes had elapsed since that terrific but brief combat: Kyri Karaman and Myrrha were now walking together, apart from the rest. The chief had his arm thrown round the splendid symmetrical form of his wife; and she was gazing up into his countenance with all that admiration and fondness with which she had been wont in former times to regard him. There was not now upon her skin the faintest trace of the dye which she had used to stain it, and which had served to disguise her: she looked eminently handsome—for the excitement of the scene that was just over had left a glow upon her countenance, which was likewise animated with admiring triumph as she was enabled

to contemplate her husband under the aspect of a hero who had delivered Count Dorval from the horrors of renewed captivity.

"Myrrha," said Kyri Karaman, "we have much to say to each other, so that I scarcely know from which point to start. But first tell me, wherefore that deception in reference to your supposed death? Believe me, my beloved Myrrha, I am now too happy in your restoration unto my arms to chide you: therefore it is simply an explanation which you called upon to give and not a defence of your conduct which I am demanding."

"Yet in giving this explanation," replied Myrrha, "I may be constrained to touch on matters that may prove offensive or hurtful to the feelings——"

"No. no—you will not offend me, Myrrha!" exclaimed the Guerilla-chief. "For heaven's sake enlighten me on all those points which are so mysterious! Why that fable of your death?—why did you sever yourself from the husband who ever loved you so fondly?—why are you now here amidst the wilds of the Caucasus?—and who is that old man to whom you declared that you were indebted to your life?"

"Listen, Kyri," rejoined Myrrha "and I will endeavour to satisfy your several queries in due time. I must begin by carrying back my recollections to that memorable day when I first encountered the Princess Leila, at the time that you and I were engaged in that deep-laid plot by means of which we hoped to obtain possession of the secret which the venerable Mansour had to reveal. I must

tell you that while seated with the Princess Leila upon the back of the streamlet—while gazing upon her beauteous countenance where everything good, generous and innocent was expressed, my soul was filled with compunction at the treachery which I was practising towards her; and I would have given worlds to be enabled to retract, and to have induced *you*, my husband, to retract likewise. The snake bit me; and then the amiable and gentle Leila exhibited the tenderest sympathy towards me. I believed that I was dying—I was stricken with remorse—I feared that I was about to enter into that unknown world where the vengeance of my Maker might punish me for my misdeeds; and I gave Leila back her ring. Of this you are already aware; but it is necessary that I should thus revert to the circumstances of that date in order that you might form an idea of the frame of mind in which I was when believing myself to be hovering on the verge of eternity."

"Continue your narrative, dearest Myrrha," said Kyri Karaman; "and believe me that I listen with the deepest interest."

"On the spot where the incidents occurred to which I am now alluding," resumed Myrrha, "was a Turkish wise-woman bearing the name of Thekla, and whom you saw on that occasion when you bent over my seemingly lifeless form at my aunt's residence in Tiflis. This woman Thekla had immediately applied her remedies when I was bitten by the black snake. She administered a balsom to the wound—and she compelled me to swallow some

mixture. The negress likewise had her own special remedies to be applied: but Thekla has since assured me that it was the mixture she had made me swallow which had the effect of neutralizing the venom of the reptile. For some little time—perhaps for upwards of an hour—I was believed to be dead, except by Thekla herself: but she knew that I was merely plunged into the stupor of a trance—and this was one of the effects of the dose she had administered. During that interval Leila had taken her departure, accompanied by her own hand-maidens. At length I returned to consciousness; and when enabled to collect my thoughts and ponder on all that had occurred, I found that a great change had taken place in my mind. I felt like one who had been rescued from the very grave itself!—and I regarded my salvation as a special interposition of providence in my behalf. A secret voice seemed to be speaking in my soul, saying, ‘Repent! turn away from the paths of evil—take example from that angelic being against whom your treacherous machinations were directed—and let your future course be that of rectitude and honour!’—It was thus that my conscience appeared to speak; and a solemn awe took possession of my soul. I resolved to obey that which seemed to be a divine impulse and a heavenly warning. But how could I follow the dictates of this altered frame of mind and likewise return to *you*? Alas! Kyri! I felt how vain and useless it was to hope that *you* would be moved by my representations or that *you* would turn from the life of evil which you

were pursuing. No!—but on the contrary, you would have sought to draw *me* back into the same vortex!—you would not have consented to become virtuous in order that we should continue to dwell together, but you would have insisted that I myself should relapse into your own ways of intrigue and iniquity! And then again how could I look you in the face and tell you that I had restored the ring to Leila,—that ring which you had dared such perils to obtain from her finger! I dreaded lest in spite of all your devoted love, you would overwhelm me with your indignation, and that you would upbraid me bitterly for what you would look upon as an act of betrayal and treachery of which I had been guilty towards my own husband. All these considerations were in themselves weighty; and there was likewise another. Deeply touched by the sympathy which Leila had manifested towards me, I in my gratitude took a solemn oath before heaven to protect her interests, if possible from whatsoever machinations you yourself might thenceforth adopt against them. And now, my beloved husband—for beloved you really are and ever have been—you may understand how it was that all those reflections, influences, views, and aims brought me to the resolve of continuing dead to the whole world, as I was already believed to be except by the excellent Thekla and my own faithful dependants. Ah! it was a tremendous sacrifice which I made in thus abandoning you; but I felt it to be my duty—I fancied likewise that such self-martyrdom would be an atonement for my past errors—and all this

inspired me with courage to execute the idea!"

"Oh, Myrrha! if you had come to me," exclaimed Kyri Karaman—"if you had told me of your altered sentiments, I myself would have made every sacrifice rather consent to a separation!"

"Oh! if this were true," ejaculated Myrrha, "you know not how immensely the assurance would tend to enhance the happiness that I now feel at being reunited to you!"

"It is true!—I swear it!" ejaculated Kyri Karaman. "Tell me to quit the command of the gallant band which again reveres me as its chief—and I will obey you! Yes, Myrrha—I knew that I always loved you well; but never did I have the perfect knowledge of how irreparably dear you were to me until you were lost. And oh! when on that memorable evening accident threw us together in the neighbourhood of Tiflis—on the evening, I mean, of Tunar's escape from the fortress—and when, insensible as I was, you bore me away to the bank of that rivulet with those refreshing waters you brought me back to life,—Oh! on that memorable evening, Myrrha, I knew that it was you at the very moment when like a vanishing spirit you flitted away from me! And ever since I have been as restless as an unquiet ghost—seeking you everywhere—wondering whether the day would ever come when we should meet again—and yet at times dreading lest it might all have been a delusion of my fevered fancy, and that it was not really my own Myrrha whom in a moment I had recognised

through the disguise of swarthy hue, when the moonbeams fell fully upon your countenance!"

"And believe me, Kyri," said Myrrha, in a low gentle voice, "that I myself was deeply moved on that memorable occasion; and it cost me a tremendous effort—I may even say the exercise of a preternatural energy—to rush away from you as I did!"

Here the Guerilla-bandit strained his handsome wife to his breast; and they exchanged the fondest caresses. At length Myrrha continued her explanations:—

"When my mind was made up to seem dead to the world and to live thenceforth under another name, veiled beneath some deep disguise and devoting myself to good purposes, I imparted my design to Thekla. She offered to assist me; and it was by no means difficult to win the complicity of my faithful negress and my equally devoted Georgian girl. I repaired secretly to Tiflis—I found an asylum at the house of my relative—and she likewise lent herself to my design. Thekla possessed the knowledge of a drug which produced a trance like that of death; and into such a trance was I thrown when you were suffered to visit my aunt's house for a few minutes and bend over what you supposed to be the lifeless corpse of your Myrrha! Leila and her cousin Prince Danial—for such indeed is he whom you knew only as Aladyn Bey—were likewise induced to visit that house, that they might there see me stretched as a corpse; for it suited my purpose to impress upon their minds the conviction that I was indeed no more. I intended thenceforth to watch over

their interests; and this I could not do if they had still known me as Myrrha, the wife of their enemy, Kyri Karaman: but as a stranger, bearing another name, I foresaw that I might find opportunities of carrying out my views. And I *have* succeeded!—for it was I who, in concert with Thekla, saved Leila from a fate which she loathed—it was I who rescued her from captivity in the imperial palace at Constantinople! She is still ignorant that under the deep swarthy complexion of Klodissa the delicate brunette skin of Myrrha was concealed;—and here I may observe that it was only within the last two or three weeks I have ceased to wear the artificial tint. Yes—I saved Leila,” continued Myrrha; “and heaven has rewarded me! Oh, yes!” she exclaimed, in a tone of fervid exultation, “heaven has indeed rewarded me!”

“What mean you, Myrrha?—what can you possibly mean?” exclaimed Kyri Karaman, gazing upon his wife with an eager intentness, as if he was smitten with an idea of the sublime truth to which she was alluding. “You would not have me understand—No, no! it is impossible!—and yet why are you here, in the heart of the Caucasian mountains?”

“I perceive, Kyri, that a suspicion of the actual fact has arisen in your mind. Yes, my beloved husband! it is true that heaven has rewarded me in the most signal manner; for that secret which in the days of my error and wickedness I was not allowed to fathom—that secret which you yourself so strongly yearned to penetrate, but which has been kept so carefully veiled against your

knowledge—that secret, Kyri,” added Myrrha, impressively, “has been made known unto me!”

It was with wonderment, joy, and admiration, also with profound curiosity and suspense, that the Guerilla-chief gazed upon his handsome wife.

“It is true, Kyri,” she said: “for months past I have been a dweller in the blessed Vale of Gulistan!—and that old man whom you have ere now so heroically delivered from the power of his foes, has recently come forth from that vale, the possessor of inestimable wealth. And oh, my husband!” she continued, “if you are indeed truly sincere in your promise to abandon this wandering life—to renounce all evil pursuits, and to render yourself worthy of the continual love of your Myrrha, as Myrrha *now* is, an altered and a chastened being—the riches of Gulistan shall be poured forth at your feet!”

Kyri Karaman fell upon his knees before his wife; and pressing her hand to his lips, he vowed that in all things he would do her bidding.

She compelled him to rise from his suppliant posture; and she embraced him fervidly. They continued to discourse upon many things; for on each side there was yet much to explain.

Then Myrrha on her own side narrated how she had fallen in with Tunar and Count Dorval—how Tunar had stabbed her—how the old Frenchman ministered unto her with even a paternal affection—and how the youth had met a horrible death in the subterranean of Gulistan.

“Reverting to everything which occurred between Tunar and my-

self at the fortress-prison of Tiflis," said Myrrha, "I have a few observations to make. I was determined to effect his liberations, because I knew him to be innocent of the murder of Mansour; for your lips had in your delirium revealed to me that Djemzet was the assassin. My soul shuddered at the idea of an innocent person being sacrificed for the crime of another; and this was one strong motive that prompted me to labour to save Tunar. But I had another reason. I was desirous of so conducting the progress of events as to wield and influence over Tunar and place a seal upon his lips in respect to everything that he might have it in his power to tell concerning yourself. Alas, my husband! I thought the name of Kyri Karaman was already sufficiently branded; and I toiled to rescue it from any additional obloquy. And likewise for my own reputation's sake was I careful; for though dead to the world so far as the name and person of Myrrha was concerned, yet for the sake of my family—those relations who are so dear to me—I was loth that the name of Myrrha should be publicly branded in a court of justice. For I thought that if Tunar were reduced to a state of desperation—if no one stepped forward to prove him innocent of Mansour's death—but if appearances were suffered to continue utterly hostile to him, he would throw himself at the feet of his judge—he would reveal everything, showing, how he had been engaged in the subtle plot with Kyri Karaman and Myrrha to obtain from Mansour's lips the revelation of an important secret. But by befriending Tunar I placed

a seal upon his lips: indeed I rendered it unnecessary for him to make any confession on those points which would have thrown additional obloquy on the name of Kyri Karaman, and which would have proclaimed to all the world that Myrrha, the child of respectable parents in Southern Georgia, had been the bride of that same dread Guerilla-bandit. But while accomplishing all these aims, I likewise took measures to separate Tunar thenceforth from yourself; for I knew how ready an agent in the cause of wickedness he was—and I felt that the less you were supported by such nefarious accomplices, the more probable was it that you would turn your footsteps into less perilous and more honourable ways."

"Even from the grave, so to speak," exclaimed Kyri Karaman, was my Myrrha thus watching over me! She, whom the world thought dead, still lived to shed her influence upon me! Oh, my beloved Myrrha! I cannot too fervidly repeat the assurance that henceforth I will obey your will in all things!"

"In the meanwhile Count Dorval was remaining in company with Kyri Karaman's men near the spot where they had delivered him from the hands of Schamyl's soldiers.

He had discovered from the incidents which had just occurred, that the chief of the succouring party was the redoubtable outlaw of whom Tunar had spoken at Garanrog Castle; and he had likewise discovered that Klodissa's proper name was Myrrha, and that she was the wife of the Guerilla-bandit.

But the old man experienced too deep a sentiment of gratitude towards Kyri for the service just rendered to feel any particular repugnance at the thought of having fallen in with such an individual;—though he pitied Myrrha, whom he had learnt to love as if she were his daughter, for being wedded to the outlaw.

After about an hour's absence from the spot, Kyri Karaman and Myrrha returned to it; and then the outlaw announced to his men that he was about to separate from them, and that they must choose themselves another leader in his stead.

They gathered around him, earnestly beseeching that he would withdraw the decision; but he was resolute.

He bade them farewell,—having first enjoined them to escort Count Dorval to Batoum, whence the old man might embark for Constantinople.

Myrrha took an opportunity of whispering in Dorval's ear that he might in all confidence trust himself to the guardianship of those men; and she likewise gladdened Dorval's heart by the assurance that her husband from that day forth determined upon entering a new career.

"Perhaps we shall meet again my kind-hearted old friend," added Myrrha, fervidly pressing Dorval's hand: "for as in these Eastern countries my husband will ever be regarded as an outlaw, it is in Western Europe that under another name he will seek by his future deeds to atone for the past!"

"It is my intention to return to Paris," replied Dorval; and full happy shall I be to welcome you

both in the capital of my native land."

The old Count took his departure with the armed escort provided for him; while Kyri Karaman and Myrrha, hand in hand, proceeded in the direction of the secret approaches of the Vale of Gulistan.

CHAPTER LV.

CONCLUSION.

THE reader will bear in mind that the incidents of our tale have brought us to the end of the year 1853. Our narrative is now about to take a leap of nearly a couple of years: but before we make this abrupt advance on the pathway of time, we must place some few necessary facts upon record.

It was about three months after Thekla's departure from Kutais that the wise woman again visited that capital.

She had in the meantime been to Tiflis; and there she heard from Myrrha's aunt certain intelligence of importance. This intelligence had led her to return to Constantinople—where, as she expected from all that had been told her, she met Myrrha and her husband. But these two now bore other names than those by which they had been known in the Caucasian provinces; they were dwelling in a sumptuous palace, and were using for the best of purposes the immense riches that they possessed. Thekla tarried with them for a little while, until they took their departure for the Western States of Europe; and then from Constantinople Thekla proceeded to

Kutais, to make known to the Princess Leila everything that had occurred in respect to Myrrha, as the details are already known to the reader. Leila was rejoiced to learn that Myrrha still lived: and she said to Thekla, "Often and often, when first I knew your Klodissa, was I struck by the tones of her voice and the beaming of her eyes: and frequently I found myself contemplating her profile, or sending my errant looks over the outlines of her form, with a vague misty idea that she was not altogether unknown to me. But still, never for a single instant did my ideas on the subject become so well defined and so positive as to identify the seeming Klodissa with the lost Myrrha!"

"And your Highness will write to her," said Thekla, "as she has implored?—and you will assure her that you regard her only with feelings of friendship?"

"I will write to her," responded Leila, "as if I remembered only the good which I have received at her hands, and as if I had never known that there was a time when she harboured treacherous ideas with regard to me."

"I expected nothing less, amiable Princess, than this assurance from your lips," rejoined Thekla.

The wise-woman remained for a few weeks at Kutais,—at the expiration of which period she set out upon her wanderings again.

A year elapsed; and still Prince Danial remained absent—still was he at St. Petersburg. The Russian Chancery pleaded the press of business occasioned by the war as an incessant pretext for postponing the consideration of his claims to be recognised as a Mingrelian

Prince; and in point of fact, the unfortunate Danial found himself detained in a species of honourable captivity at the Russian court. He frequently corresponded with Leila,—receiving from her most affectionate letters in response to his own: but the youthful lovers thus cruelly separated, could scarcely disguise from each other that their hopes were exhausted and that their spirit was being broken by the weight of the calamity which had severed them.

Thekla again returned to Kutais: she found the Princess Leila sinking into complete despondency, and suffering in health. The kind-hearted woman melted at the mournful spectacle, and her resolve was quickly taken.

"It is but too evident, from the young Prince's letters," she said, "cautiously worded though they are that he is detained in a species of captivity at St. Petersburg. I will proceed thither in the hope of effecting his escape. If I succeed he shall accompany me secretly, and under some deep disguise, to Kutais; so that you may take counsel together for your future proceedings. Perhaps after all these bitter experiences of Russian treachery, his Highness Prince Danial will no longer insist that you, amiable Leila, shall remain a crowned phantom upon the Mingrelian throne; but in order that you may bestow your hand upon him, he will yield to your own desire to abdicate this mock sovereignty and retire into private life."

Leila embraced the wise woman who was firm in her resolve to set off for St. Petersburg, under some disguise which would conceal the

fact that she was a native of the Ottoman empire; and this she knew would not be difficult, inasmuch as she was acquainted with many languages, picked up during her wandering career. She set off from Kutais, accompanied by the heartfelt gratitude, the blessings, and the fervid hopes of the amiable Leila.

Months passed; and the Star of Mingrelia received no intelligence from Thekla—while after a certain period her cousin Danial's correspondence likewise suddenly ceased. The Princess knew not whether to hope from this silence that everything had succeeded, or whether to dread that everything had failed and that both her cousin and Thekla were in close captivity within the walls of some Russian fortress. She was thus in a cruel state of uncertainty, when towards the close of the year 1855, the thunder-clouds of war which had hitherto been pouring forth their din in the Danubian Principalities, the Crimea, and in the northern province of Asiatic Turkey, suddenly threatened to burst above the heads of the Mingrelian people.

Rumours reached Kutais that Omar Pasha, the illustrious Generalissimo of the Ottomans, was meditating a campaign against the Russians in the Caucasian provinces. The Russian authorities themselves were at first incredulous on the point,—until the tidings suddenly arrived that a division of Turkish troops had landed at Souchoum-Kaleh, a small Mingrelian town upon the coast of the Black Sea. The Russian General-in-Chief now commenced preparations for resistance; and a

strong force was despatched to meet the Ottomans in case they should penetrate farther into the country. Kutais was left comparatively undefended; and by the absence of the Russian commandant, with all his chief officials, Leila was enabled to exercise a real uncoerced authority for the first time since she had ascended the Mingrelian throne. Her Ministers were rejoiced that the Ottomans were entering the territory; for they abhorred the Russians—they felt confident that the sword of Muscovite power would be snapped by Omar Pasha in Mingrelia, as he had already broken it in the Danubian Principalities—and they secretly despatched messengers to the Ottoman Generalissimo to assure him of the sympathy of the Mingrelian Sovereign and her people.

In a little while intelligence reached Kutais to the effect that the Russian army was posted on the bank of the river Ingouri, and that the Turkish troops were advancing thitherward from Souchoum-Kaleh under the command of Omar Pasha in person. This was at the commencement of November in the year 1855, so that our narrative has now taken the leap for which the reader was prepared at the opening of this chapter. All was suspense in Kutais and the surrounding districts: for it was evident that a great battle must take place on the banks of the Ingouri, and that the fate of Mingrelia must be there decided—whether the principality should be emancipated from Russian rule, or whether it should be subjected, to perhaps a more real and palpable Muscovite despotism than it had yet experienced.

But at the expiration of a few days all suspense was at an end: the tidings reached Kutais that the Russian army had been utterly routed on the banks of the Ingouri, and the victorious troops of the Ottoman Serdar were continuing their course through the fertile plains of Mingrelia. The Mingrelian Ministers now recommended their Princess to remove with all possible speed from the capital, on which the routed Russians were supposed to falling back: for it was dreaded lest the defeated Muscovites should vent upon Leila their vindictive rage on account of the sympathy which the Mingrelians had demonstrated towards the Turkish invaders. Leila accordingly quitted Kutais; and she proceeded, with her Ministers, her retinue, and a small escort of Mingrelian militia, to a castle-palace which she possessed on the river Rhion, and which offered the best protection until the approach of the Ottoman army. But this movement of the Mingrelian Sovereign was by some means reported to the Russian commander, who, having collected his fugitive troops and received reinforcements, at once determined to take up a new position on the banks of the Rhion. By this manœuvre he hoped to effect a twofold object: namely, to get possession of the person of the Princess Leila, and to make a successful stand against the advancing Ottomans. For the Russian General calculated that he could so work upon the fears of Leila as to induce her to sign proclamations, warning the Mingrelians against the Turks, and calling upon her subjects to rise against those infidel invaders.

Leila succeeded in reaching the Castle of Rhion in safety: but on the following day the long lines of Muscovite troops were seen advancing down the same side of the river. The active Ministers of the Princess had however procured the intelligence that the victorious Serdar marching with all his forces towards the same point; and thus, when the castle was summoned by the Russians to surrender, Leila, with the intrepidity of a heroine, resolved to abide a siege and trust to the issue of events.

It was not however very long before the columns of the Ottoman army were seen advancing in the distance; and messengers were despatched to Omar Pasha, informing his Highness of the state of affairs, and imploring him to lose no time in coming to the succour of the castle. In a few hours the banks of the Rhion became the scene of a struggle as deadly as that which had recently occurred upon the Ingouri: but the result of this second battle was more fatal to the Russian arms than that of the former. The Muscovite troops were completely defeated after a sanguinary conflict—hundreds of them perished in the Rhion or strewed the banks with their bloodstained corpses; and the remainder fled in a state of confusion which proved that as an army they were utterly demoralized and virtually extinct. It was a brilliant victory thus gained by the mighty Serdar and his gallant troops: and it ensured freedom and safety to the Princess Leila and all her faithful retainers.

Scarcely was the battle over at two o'clock in the afternoon, when the Princess Leila was about to

retire to her chamber in order to apparel herself in a befitting manner to receive the illustrious Serdar of the Ottomans—when the door of the state apartment where for hours she had remained in anxious suspense was thrown open, and her cousin Prince Danial made his appearance. The lovers were quickly clasped in each other's arms; and when this fervid embrace was exchanged, the Ministers and Mingrelian dignitaries who were present stepped forward to congratulate the Prince on his return to his native land. But Leila was now strained to the heart of another person who was dear to her; and this was Thekla, the wise-woman. Explanations were speedily given down to a certain point.

"To this excellent friend," exclaimed Prince Danial, indicating Thekla, "am I indebted for my escape from St. Petersburg. There I was continuously watched by spies: but Thekla's ingenuity devised the means of baffling them all—and we issued from the Russian capital. I cannot now pause to tell you the fatigues we have endured, the perils we have encountered, and the stratagems to which we have had recourse in order to baffle the pursuers who were sent after us, and the local authorities of every district; for we were compelled to travel without passports, often on foot, and frequently in the night time. We did not dare trust a letter to the post; and thus our own anxiety was great on account of the incertitude which we knew must exist relative to our fate on the part of yourself, my beloved cousin. But at length we entered the Mingrelian territory—

and heaven be thanked, we are safe in the end!"

The latter portion of this speech was overheard by two Turkish officers of the highest distinction who had just reached at the time the threshold of the apartment. One was his Highness Omar Pasha; the other was Mohammed, formerly Pasha of Kars, but lately removed to the higher position of Governor of Trebizonde, and now serving as second in command in the army of the Generalissimo. Prince Danial presented the Serdar to his cousin the Princess Leila, who expressed herself in suitable terms when pouring forth her gratitude to the illustrious Ottoman chieftain for the immense service which he had rendered her. Warm was the greeting between Leila and Mohammed Pasha; for he it remembered they had met before, at the house of the Georgian widow—and the ottoman dignitary regarded Leila with affection as the intended bride of his adopted nephew her cousin.

"The modesty of Prince Danial," said Omar Pasha, "has left untold much that might be added to the narrative he was finishing at the moment when I reached the room. But it is for me to complete the tale; and this task I will perform with all the greater satisfaction, inasmuch as it enables me to pay a meet tribute of praise to the valour of him who has borne a prominent part alike in the battles of the Ingouri and the Rhion. Yes, Princess, Leila! your cousin is worthy of the highest eulogium. He came up with my army in the neighbourhood of the Ingouri; accident at once threw him in the

way of my eminent friend Mohammed Pasha; and I need not tell your Highness how joyous was that meeting. The young Prince was introduced to me; and I at once gave him the command of a squadron of cavalry. In the thickest of the fight on the bank of the Ingouri, was Prince Danial found; and the same may be said of his valorous bearing in the tremendous struggle this day along the waters of the Rhion."

Leila flung looks of admiration upon her heroic cousin; and her Ministers expressed in fervid language the same admiring sentiments. Omar Pasha presently found an opportunity of saying a few words apart to the Star of Mingrelia, to whom he spoke in the following strain:—

"I have learnt from Thekla—who has been a faithful friend to Prince Danial—many particulars of your Highness's own extraordinary history. Little did I think that when at Constantinople, upwards of two years back, I heard it reported in the palace that the favourite of the Ramazan represented herself to be the Princess of Mingrelia,—little, I say, did I think that there was in reality the most sincere truth in the representation. Perhaps even still less could I have conceived that when, as a matter of duty, I prevented some rude subalterns from violating the sanctity of the coffin which was bearing forth that same favourite of the Ramazan, I should ever behold her a living being, and that I should find her to be the veritable Princess of Mingrelia,—as in her presence I have now the honour and pleasure to stand,"

If Leila had previously found cause to admire the matchless valour and consummate skill of the Ottoman Generalissimo, she had now every reason to be pleased with the elegance of his manners, the kindness of his bearing, and the proofs which his words and acts alike afforded of the noble generosity of his heart. On his own side, the Serdar was delighted with the amiability and the intelligence of the Mingrelian Princess; while his looks indicated a chivalrous respectful admiration for her transcending beauty.

Yes—for never did Leila seem more lovely than she now was!—never did she more fully appear to merit that appellation of Dizila, or the Star, which her admiring and adoring subjects had bestowed upon her! For her heart was full of happiness: her cousin was restored to her—he had returned covered with glory—he had won for himself a name that would endear him to the Mingrelian people—and Mingrelia itself was emancipated from the Russian yoke. Fortune was smiling most cheerfully and most encouragingly upon the charming Leila: heaven seemed to be resolved to reward her with blessings in atonement for the many sufferings she had endured.

A few days afterwards the nuptials of Prince Danial and the Princess Leila were celebrated in the Oratory of the palace-castle. The two highest dignitaries of the Mingrelian Greek Church officiated at the altar: three young ladies of rank acted as the bridesmaids; Omar Pasha, accompanied by Mohammed Pasha, and attend-

ed by his principal aides-de-camp, was present at the ceremony. When it was completed, the princely couple set out under a strong escort of Ottoman soldiers for Kutais, where a proclamation had previously been issued to the effect that the Princess Leila had recognised Prince Danial as her cousin, and purposed to share with him the Mingrelian throne. The whole population of Kutais crowded in the streets to give an enthusiastic welcome to the princely cortege; and amidst the most fervid acclamations did it proceed to the palace.

For some weeks the Ottoman army remained in occupation of the Mingrelian territory, until peace between Russia and the Allied Powers was agreed upon. Then, through the intervention and in accordance with the earnest representations of the Serdar, the Sultan instructed his plenipotentiaries in Paris to stipulate for the addition of a secret article to the treaty, according to which Russia guaranteed the complete independence of Mingrelia; and thus Prince Danial and his beauteous bride reign as vertible Sovereigns, unshackled by foreign influences, in their native province.

Thekla's health was so much shattered by the fatigues and hardships she endured in the congenial climate of Russia, that she found herself constrained, to abandon her wandering life; and she accepted an asylum at the palatial mansion of that young couple in whom she had shown herself so much interested, and on whose behalf she had performed so many services.

Count Dorval returned in safety to Paris, where he occupies a sumptuous mansion in the neighbourhood of the Champs Elysees; and he lives in a style which proves him to be possessed of a princely fortune. In the same district, and at an equally splendid abode, resides a couple as remarkable for the magnificence of their personal beauty as for the devoted love which subsists between them. They bear a Greek name; and though it is not exactly known from what quarter of this world they come, they are nevertheless courted by the highest society; for to this end Count Dorval's introduction was sufficient. They are very intimate with the Count; he regards them with a parental fondness;—and they too possess riches of a vastness as astonishing as his own. Our readers will scarcely require to be informed that this fond couple whose prosperity is so great and whose happiness is so complete, are none other than those who once bore the names of Kyri Karaman and Myrrha.

The marvellous history of the Princess Leila Dizila was confidentially communicated by Omar Pasha to the Sultan; and his Imperial Majesty exchanged amicable correspondence as well as costly presents with the youthful Sovereigns of Mingrelia. The Sultan moreover enacted a law by virtue of which no young female could henceforth without her consent become the favourite of the Ramazan; and this generous policy he adopted in honour of the Star of Mingrelia. His Imperial Majesty learning likewise of Tarkhana's friendly complicity in the plot which had rescued Leila from the

palace, spoke most kindly to that Sultana, and expressed his admiration of the goodness and generosity which she had displayed towards the Mingrelian Princess. Furthermore, as a mark of his special favour, he permitted Tarkhana to correspond periodically with her mother and sisters; and thus the Georgian widow and the two daughters who dwelt with her have had much if not the whole of their lost happiness restored to them.

Contrary to all former precedents the secret of Gulistan is now in the keeping of *five* persons, instead of *three*. These five are the Prince

and Princess of Mingrelia, Count Dorval, and those two who once bore the names of Kyri Karaman and Myrrha. But though many of the mysteries of that delightful retreat are now made known to the world through the medium of this narrative, yet the *one* grand secret which remains untold, and the existence of which neutralizes as it were the revelations of all the rest, is in the possession of those five persons only. We allude to the means of opening the mysteriously contrived doors, the unfolding of which can alone afford admission into the Vale of Gulistan.

THE END.





